

Arab Monetary Fund deposits \$50 million in Central Bank

AMMAN (Petra) — The Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) Sunday deposited \$50 million in the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) and its Programme on Financing Inter-Arab Trade offered Jordan \$50 million in credit facilities to help finance trade exchanges with the other Arab countries. An agreement signed by CBJ Governor Ziyad Fariz and AMF Board Chairman Jasssem Mana'i said the \$50 million in credit facilities can be used by Jordan within 12 months in its trade exchanges with Arab states, while the \$50 million deposit has been placed in the CBJ in order to enhance and help stabilise the Kingdom's national currency by increasing its foreign currency reserves. In a press statement following the signing of the agreement, Mana'i said the agreement is part of the AMF's drive to encourage trade exchanges among Arab states and contribute to Arab economic integration.

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King, former U.S. ambassadors discuss peace process, economy

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Abdullah said Sunday that Jordan will remain committed to the late King Hussein's foreign and domestic policies, stressing that the Kingdom will continue efforts to arrive at a comprehensive peace for all peoples in the region.

Speaking at a meeting with former U.S. ambassadors Roscoe Suddarth and Richard Murphy at the Royal court, King Abdullah said Jordan considers peace the best guarantee for the region in the near and distant future.

But the King noted that peace requires the combined efforts of all nations in the region and the world.

In his meeting with Suddarth, who is president of the Middle East Institute, and Murphy, a senior fellow at the Institute, King Abdullah spoke about the difficulties and challenges facing the development process in Jordan.

The King said Jordan is

placing economic reform on the top of its priorities to address problems facing the Jordanian people under the current difficult circumstances.

He also undertaken Jordan's determination to work for the creation of an investment climate to attract investors from Arab and foreign countries.

Also Sunday, King Abdullah met with a delegation representing American friends of the Israeli Meretz Party for talks on the peace process and the obstacles facing the Palestinian-Israeli track.

Calling for consolidated efforts to overcome the difficulties, the King stressed the need for all concerned parties to honour their commitments so that a durable peace can be guaranteed. King Abdullah stressed that the requirements of peace should override the requirements of national elections.

The King also met Peter Gubser, president of the American Near East

King, Mubarak meet today

CAIRO (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak today will hold a meeting in Taba to discuss recent developments in the peace process and bilateral relations, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa said. Musa added that King Abdullah and Mubarak will also inaugurate a project linking the electricity grids of Jordan and Egypt.

Refugee Aid (ANERA) institution, and discussed the question of Palestinian refugees, their status and the burden shouldered by Jordan in accommodating the largest number of refugees.

King Abdullah called for intensive international efforts to help the refugees realise their rights to compensation and repatriation in accordance with U.N. resolutions.

King Abdullah also thanked the U.S. institution for its continued assistance to the Palestinian refugees.

Founded in 1968, ANERA is a non-profit, charitable organisation

which is principally concerned with the long-term development needs of Palestinians and Lebanese.

ANERA assists grassroots organisations to provide their communities with crucial health and community services in addition to increasing employment and educational opportunities for deprived groups.

The institution helps provide basic necessities of life to people adversely affected by war and conflict.

King Abdullah also met with the visiting chairman of the Arab Monetary Fund, Jasssem Mana'i. The King expressed Jordan's appreciation for AMF assistance.



His Majesty King Abdullah meets Sunday with a child injured in a fire at a kindergarten in the northern part of the country (Photo by Yusef 'Allan)

King visits children injured in school fire

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Abdullah and HRH Princess Rania on Sunday visited children who were injured in a fire at a kindergarten yesterday and ordered that the best possible care be accorded to them.

A total of 27 children from the Jaafar - Tayyar kindergarten in the town of Mughayer in Irbid governorate suffered first and second degree burns after a

kerosene heater that was accidentally overturned by one of the children set fire to the room, according to the children's teacher.

King Abdullah, who was also accompanied by Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh, Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabarti, Interior Minister Nayef Qadi, Health Minister Ismael Maraga and the governor of Irbid, met with the children at Princess Basma Hospital

and received information about their condition from staff doctors.

The King issued directives that the best possible treatment be accorded to the children.

King Abdullah and Princess Rania spoke with the injured children and their parents and heard from them about the level of service at the hospital.

Hospital doctors told Jordan Television that most of

the children were discharged after receiving treatment. They said eight children suffering from burns to the face and hands remained in hospital.

Doctors said they expected all children to be discharged within a few days.

Qadi urged the Ministry of Education and other concerned authorities to ensure that teachers take extra precautions to prevent similar incidents.

King meets with JPA today

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — The Jordan Press Association is scheduled to meet with His Majesty King Abdullah today, signalling that a renewed dialogue on the country's Press and Publications Law is picking up momentum.

JPA President Seif Sherif said the meeting's agenda is an "open one, but we hope that we will have a chance to convey our concerns not only about the press law, but about all issues that concern our profession."

The meeting follows an appointment yesterday between the JPA and Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabarti and another meeting the previous day between the JPA and Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh.

When the Rawabdeh government was formed 11 days ago, journalists hailed the appointment of three "liberal" politicians — Kabarti, Rawabdeh and Information Minister Nasser Lawzi, all known critics of the 1998 press law — to key Cabinet posts. But they said they feared that the press law would have to take a back seat to more pressing issues, such as the economy, unemployment and this year's looming drought, all of which ranked high on the agenda in King Abdullah's letter of designation.

The JPA has been the first of the country's 13 professional associations invited to meet senior officials, and Sherif said the JPA and the media have been pleasantly surprised by the interest so far shown in the press.

"We will be the first association to meet His Majesty. We find it a positive sign that we are able to engage in constructive dialogue at the highest levels, and we are very encouraged by this signal," he said. "We are looking forward to seeing how King Abdullah views things."

(Continued on page 2)

Poll finds public opinion against unity with PNA before Palestinian independence

By Saad G. Hattar

AMMAN — Most Jordanians are opposed to the prospects of either a confederation or federation with the Palestine National Authority before the creation of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, according to a poll carried out by a local newspaper.

The poll, published Sunday by the Arabic daily Al Arab Al Yawm, found that 58.9 per cent of the sample were against any Jordanian-Palestinian unity before the creation of a Palestinian state.

Nevertheless, 51.3 per cent of the polled sample — covering 596 people chosen at random in the 12 governorates — favoured full-fledged unity, but only with a future sovereign Palestinian entity.

When it came to confederation or federation, however, the percentage dropped to 42 and 40.7 per cent, respectively. While Jordan officially maintains a headline stance on this issue, the poll sought, according to the paper, to gauge the overall mood at the grassroots level regarding this thorny political subject.

PNA leader Yasser Arafat

rekindled the issue when he

offered a confederated West Bank with Jordan, shortly after the death of King Hussein on Feb. 7.

Jordan dismissed again as "premature" Arafat's apparent trial balloon, ahead of the May 4 target set to declare a Palestinian state regardless of the outcome of peace negotiations with Israel.

Political circles in Amman do not see eye-to-eye with the PNA leadership on the proposed confederation.

"There is a consensus that the Jordanian-Palestinian bond is quite unique and stronger than all theoretical formulae... but there is also a consensus that the timing for this project is not ripe yet," said Senator Marwan Dudin. "Any talk of unity should not be discussed before the Palestinians secure their right on their soil including an independent Palestinian state."

Dudin, a former minister for occupied territories affairs, told the Jordan Times that the poll highlighted a strong tendency amongst Jordanians for unity.

He noted, however, that "the insistence by either side towards confederation now could jeopardise the rights of both parties."

When the late King Hussein

severed administrative and legal ties with the West Bank in July 1988, he sought to pave the way for an independent Palestinian state, according to political analysts.

It would be "detrimental to the dreams of Palestinians and the Jordanians should they move toward unity before the PNA builds a worldwide recognised state," one analyst said.

Regardless of its results, the public opinion poll falls within the guidelines of Jordan's official stance, built on a plebiscite as a prerequisite for confederation.

Amman has repeatedly rebuffed the PLO's calls for confederation, stating that such an eventuality could only be achieved after the creation of a Palestinian state and after referendums on both sides of the Jordan River.

King Hussein assumed his constitutional powers in 1953, barely two years after the unity between the West Bank and Jordan, the strongest and longest in the Arab World.

But in 1967, the West Bank — including east Jerusalem — was occupied by Israel in a war the King never sought.

(Continued on page 2)

Jordan 'strongly' rejects Israeli plan to reduce water supplies

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — Jordan on Sunday "strongly" rejected an Israeli request to cut 60 per cent of this year's water supplies to the Kingdom promised under the 1994 peace treaty in order to fend off a drought in the Jewish state, a senior official said.

The official added that during a meeting in Jerusalem, the Jordanian delegation dismissed the Israeli argument and demanded full implementation of the peace deal "to secure the Kingdom's rightful water share."

"Jordan wants to make it clear that the peace accord has set up our legitimate water shares, and it has nothing to do with a drought in Israel," the official, who asked not to be named, told

the Jordan Times.

The Cabinet will hold a meeting today at the Water Ministry to discuss the general water situation in Jordan and plans to deal with a possible shortage this summer and was expected to issue a statement on Israel's request.

According to Annex II of the peace treaty, Israel extracts 12 million cubic metres (mcm) of water from the Yarmouk River in summer — May 15 to Oct. 15 of each year — and Jordan extracts the rest of the river's flow.

In winter — Oct. 16 to May 14 — Israel pumps out 13mcm and Jordan allows Israel to pump an additional 20mcm from the river. In return for the additional water that Jordan grants to Israel in winter, Israel agrees

to transfer 20mcm to the Kingdom from the Jordan River directly upstream from Deganya gates on the river in summer.

In line with the treaty, the two countries last year began construction of a JD1.65 million diversion dam to more effectively utilise 40mcm of the Yarmouk's overflow per year and regulate year-round inflow of water to the 110-kilometre-long King Abdullah Canal.

Also in accordance with the treaty, the Kingdom is currently storing winter water in Lake Tiberias which it reclaims in the summer, supplying 60-80mcm.

Last month, the government denied news reports that Israel would stop pumping water to Jordan in order

to cope with a regional drought, saying that the Kingdom requested a temporary shutoff to guarantee a saving of its own supplies.

Israel assured Jordan months ago that it was committed to the peace treaty, refuting earlier statements by its Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan that it should reconsider the water agreement signed with the Kingdom.

"Israel will stand by all its commitments in the peace accord with Jordan and shall continue cooperation with the Kingdom on various issues, including water, as outlined in the agreement between the two countries," Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon said then in an official clarification after Jordan protested Eitan's statement.

Israel rejects any concessions on status of occupied Jerusalem

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israel's government adopted a resolution Sunday vowing never to cede any of Arab east Jerusalem to Palestinian control or to allow part of the disputed city to be internationalised.

"Israel will not accept under any circumstance the division or internationalisation of Jerusalem, which will remain for eternity under the exclusive sovereignty of the state of Israel," read the declaration.

The resolution aimed to counter a European Union statement earlier this month asserting that under international law Jerusalem remained a "separate body" from Israel.

The EU stance was expressed in a message transmitted by EU ambassadors in Israel in response to an Israeli attempt last month to keep EU

diplomats from meeting with Palestinian officials at Orient House, the unofficial PLO office in the Arab eastern sector of Jerusalem.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders responded furiously to the EU message, which Sunday's cabinet resolution said was "false in fact and from a legal standpoint and is totally unacceptable."

Israel occupied east Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war and illegally annexed the sector, now home to some 200,000 Palestinians and 160,000 Israelis.

The Israeli parliament in 1980 proclaimed all of Jerusalem the "eternal and indivisible capital of Israel" in a move never recognised by the international community.

Palestinians want to make Arab east Jerusalem the capital

of a future state and Israel agreed under the Oslo interim peace accords to negotiate the final status of the city.

But Netanyahu told his cabinet Sunday that "Jerusalem is non-negotiable."

"Any attempt to undermine the sovereignty of the city will prompt an immediate and firm response," he said, according to an official account of the meeting.

Netanyahu has decided in light of the EU letter to make the issue of Jerusalem a central theme of his campaign for general elections in May, even though his main rivals espouse the same position that Israel should never cede sovereignty over the city.

Netanyahu's Likud Party unveiled new campaign slogans last week implying that the opposition Labour Party would give control over east

Jerusalem to the Palestinians. Labour Party leader Ehud Barak fired back by attacking Sunday's cabinet resolution as a campaign gimmick.

"Instead of wasting time on television appearances on issues that Israel is united about, the time has come for Netanyahu to present the cabinet with decisions that will solve the real problems facing Israel," he said in a statement.

Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon, meanwhile, ordered Israel's embassies and missions abroad to launch a global public relations campaign about Jerusalem.

The premier's office said the campaign would also "mobilise the Jewish communities and friends of Israel around the world to explain our stance."

Under a 1947 U.N. partition plan for Palestine which led to

Israel's creation, Jerusalem was to have been an international city separate from the Jewish state.

Israel, however, made west Jerusalem its capital in 1948 after Arabs rejected the U.N. plan.

The international community has never recognised that decision or the subsequent annexation of east Jerusalem.

Israeli politicians from both the governing and opposition camps have endorsed a compromise formula in which the Palestinians would be able to establish their capital, Al Quds, in an Arab suburb adjacent to annexed east Jerusalem.

Under the formula, reportedly backed by some senior Palestinian officials, an internationalised corridor would link the Palestinian capital to Muslim holy sites inside east Jerusalem's Old City.

Jerusalem Palestinians strike over Israel conference

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — A general strike closed businesses and schools in Palestinian sectors of Arab east Jerusalem Sunday to protest Israel's hosting of an international cultural conference in the Arab city.

Militants from the Fatah movement of Palestinian National Authority chief Yasser Arafat organised the strike, telling shop owners in Arab east Jerusalem's commercial areas, including the walled Old City, to close their doors for the day, witnesses said.

The action was called to protest the opening later Sunday by the Israeli-controlled municipal government of an

international conference of city governments in a west Jerusalem hotel.

The fifth annual Educating Cities Conference brought representatives from 150 towns and cities in 30 countries to Jerusalem for three days of discussions on the theme "Taking Heritage into the Future."

A statement issued by the strike organisers in east Jerusalem charged that Israeli authorities had no right to host the conference in a city where Palestinian culture and institutions were under attack.

"Holding this conference in Jerusalem is an attempt to falsify history and the cultural heritage" of Jerusalem, it said.

Palestinians to decide on statehood in May

MUSCAT (AFP) — The Palestinians are to meet in early May to decide on a declaration of statehood, presidential advisor Nabil Abu Rudeina told AFP during a visit to Muscat with President Yasser Arafat on Sunday.

"Palestinian officials and the PLO's Central Council and executive committee will hold a meeting at the beginning of May to decide, in the light of discussions, if a Palestinian state should be declared May 4, he said.

The PLO's Central Council

is the highest authority after the PLO's Palestinian National Council or parliament.

"The Palestinian position is still that May 4 is the fixed date," on declaring statehood, Rudeina stressed, although "the Palestinian leadership will study all proposals and ideas."

The Palestinian president has repeatedly said that he wants to declare an independent Palestinian state on May 4, which marks the end of a five-year period of

autonomy set out in the Oslo accords signed with Israel in 1993.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has warned Arafat not to unilaterally declare a Palestinian state, saying it would void the Oslo accords, which provides for negotiations on the final status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The United States and the European Union (EU) have both called for the declaration of statehood to be delayed fearing it will escalate tensions in the Middle

East.

International Cooperation Minister Nabil Shaath told AFP during Arafat's visit to the United Arab Emirates earlier in the day that the president was considering "requests and advice" to delay the declaration of statehood.

"We are receiving advice and requests to delay the proclamation of statehood," he added, and said Arafat would only take a decision after "consulting all the countries which signed the Oslo accords."



Lebanese children sit in their father's damaged car after it was hit by Israeli shells in the village of Haddatha in south Lebanon on Sunday. A Lebanese man and woman were wounded on Sunday in shelling from inside Israel's south Lebanon occupation zone, a security source said (Reuters photo)

Ultra-Orthodox Jews launch campaign as leader faces verdict

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — The powerful ultra-Orthodox party Shas launched an international campaign of protests and prayer vigils Sunday ahead of a court verdict on bribery charges against party leader Ariel Deri.

Several hundred youths were let out of Shas religious seminaries to hold a prayer vigil for Deri at Jerusalem's Western Wall, the first of a series of demonstrations planned by Shas ahead of Wednesday's court hearing.

The turnout fell far below the 10,000 Deri supporters Shas said would flock to the wall, the holiest site in Judaism.

Police have been put on special alert and extra security measures planned for court officials involved in the case against Deri, a champion of Israel's Sephardi community of Oriental Jews and one of the country's most influential politicians.

Deri faces a possible prison term and fine if convicted on bribery charges dating back five years when he was director general of the interior ministry and then interior minister.

Militants in Shas, the third biggest party in Israel's outgoing parliament and a traditional power-broker in the country's coalition governments, have threatened massive protests if Deri is convicted.

The militants say a conviction would be a new sign of official persecution of the Sephardi community, Jews from North African and Middle Eastern countries who have traditionally formed the underclass in an Israeli society dominated by the Ashkenazi or European elite.

At hundreds of Sephardi synagogues around Israel special prayers were held during the Jewish Sabbath Saturday for Deri's acquittal and in one Shas stronghold in Jerusalem protesters blocked roads and

burned trash cans in a preview of what can be expected if he is convicted.

Posters around Sephardi neighbourhoods called on people to join protests this week to "express their pain" at Deri's legal travails.

Thousands of Shas supporters are expected to gather around the Jerusalem courthouse where the verdict will be delivered Wednesday and police are planning a major deployment in the area to prevent rioting.

Pro-Deri events have also been planned in New York, Britain, Italy, Mexico, Argentina and Brazil, party officials said. Whichever way it swings, the verdict is expected to impact on the campaign for Israeli general elections on May 17 in which Shas had hoped to win more than the 10 seats it held in the outgoing 120-member parliament.

An acquittal would boost Shas claims that Deri has

been targeted for harassment by a judiciary which is biased against Sephardis and religious Jews in general.

A guilty verdict would make a martyr of Deri, who has led Shas from obscurity to become the third largest political party after the governing Likud and opposition Labour groups, and fuel Shas charges of Sephardi persecution.

Several other leaders of Shas, which runs a vast network of religious and welfare institutions around Israel, have faced charges of fraud for illicit funding of their activities.

Regardless of Wednesday's verdict, Deri faces further prosecution on charges of fraud and breach of trust dating from his period at the interior ministry from 1988 to 1993.

He is notably accused of funneling public funds to Shas social and religious organisations. He denies the allegations.

Christian series address developmental issues

AMMAN (J.T.) — Filming began in February for an Arabic-language 24-part television series dealing with development issues. The Palestinian production company Star 2000 began shooting the series in the Palestinian town of Ramallah. The series is being produced for the Christian satellite station SAT-7 with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The first episode of the series will air in June on the Cyprus-based SAT-7. "The house of Abu Youssef" is a television series about a Christian Arab family trying to deal with health and development issues as well as common social problems that face people of the Middle East

and North Africa.

Terence Ascott, the Chief Executive Officer of SAT-7, said this series will allow people in the Middle East and North Africa to see common social and developmental problems addressed within the context of a Christian Arab family. "Many of our Arab viewers, especially in North Africa, don't even know that there are Christian Arabs," Executive producer Daoud Kuttab, co-director of the Palestinian production company Star 2000, hails the series as a major boost to the young Palestinian television industry. "This is a perfect opportunity to be involved in a quality television series while at the same time providing a rare hands-on

training for young Palestinian television practitioners."

"The House of Abu Youssef" has been written and directed by veteran filmmaker George Khleif who welcomed the chance to be involved in the series. "For the most part, Arab television is dominated by low quality-Egyptian soaps and films. This is a chance to try and make a leap in Arab television programming. We have tried to introduce light comedy using the best Palestinian actors in a quality television series that has important social values," Eman Oun, a seasoned theatre actress, plays the lead female role of Um Youssef, a devout mother who combines Christian piety with common wisdom. Makram

Khoury, one of the Palestinian acting stars, plays the role of Abu George, a wise and at times difficult grandfather. Bushra Karaman is the widowed neighbour, Um Bassam who is always chasing after Abu George. Sawwan Dughman is the young daughter Hanan who is torn between her schoolwork and an infatuation with Paul (played by Sami Al Muta'awi) her cousin who returned from the U.S. to try and contribute to his country's development. Ten-year-old Nidal Atallah the youngest actor from the Dheisheh refugee camp plays Hanan's young and energetic brother, Youssef. The House of Abu Youssef is the first production of its kind by SAT-7.

U.S. warplanes bomb Iraqi sites in north

ANKARA (AFP) — U.S. warplanes taking off from the Incirlik air base in southern Turkey bombed Iraqi anti-aircraft artillery sites in the northern no-fly zone on Sunday, a statement from the base said.

"Responding in self-defence, U.S. Air Force F-15E Strike Eagles dropped GBU-12 laser guided bombs on several anti-aircraft artillery sites north-west and west of Mosul," the statement said.

It added that the strikes came after Iraqi artillery opened fire and radar locked onto the aircraft.

"All coalition aircraft departed the area safely," the statement said.

U.S. and British fighter jets have had almost daily run ins with Iraqi air defences in northern and southern Iraq since the four-day Desert Fox bombing campaign in December. Baghdad has never recognised the air-exclusion zones which were imposed by the United States and its allies after the 1991 Gulf War to protect Iraq's Kurdish and Shiite minorities.

The northern no-fly zone is patrolled by planes taking off from Incirlik, while the southern exclusion zone is monitored by planes based in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Senior Turkish authorities have openly expressed their concerns over the increasing number of strikes launched by planes taking off from Incirlik.

U.S. warplanes bombed missile sites in the northern no-fly zone on Friday while U.S. Assistant Secretary for the Middle East Martin Indyk was in Ankara discussing engagement rules for the pilots with Turkish

officials.

"I think that matter has been resolved. I think we have a clear understanding on that as well. The rules of engagement are clear and we have, of course, respectable engagements," Indyk told reporters.

Egypt steps up warnings against strikes

CAIRO (AFP) — Egypt on Sunday issued a new call for a halt to U.S.-British air strikes against Iraq, saying it was afraid the international community would come to accept them as routine.

The call from President Hosni Mubarak's advisor Osama Al Baz came as U.S. warplanes taking off from the Incirlik air base in southern Turkey bombed Iraqi anti-aircraft artillery sites in the northern no-fly zone on Sunday.

"We fear that the U.S. strikes against Iraq will become a routine which the international community gets used to," Baz said during a meeting with young people in Cairo.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa said here Saturday that Mubarak had asked the United States to stop its relentless bombing raids and condemned U.N. Security Council passivity.

"The Security Council must move and study this issue, because maintaining this situation is dangerous," Musa told journalists after meeting Arab League Secretary General Essam Abdul Meguid.

Musa said Mubarak outlined the Egyptian stand when he met with U.S. Secretary of Defence William Cohen in Cairo on Thursday.

King meets with JPA today

(Continued from page 1)

Media observers also said they interpreted the attention so far showered on the JPA as a positive sign.

"[It was] expected that this government would have a greater interest in the press than previous ones, but it was not expected to see so much activity so soon," said Osama Maqadadi, director of the Arab Media Institute, a recently established media monitor. "Now it seems that all the appropriate sides — the press, the government, the Royal Court and the Parliament — are involved and talking, which is what we sought. This shows that

intent on all sides is good."

Twelve deputies in the Lower House of Parliament last week submitted a petition to House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali to reintroduce the press law to the House agenda. The motion must secure a simple majority in the 80-member House before being forwarded to the government.

The JPA's meeting with Rawabdeh on Saturday did not result in a solid announcement of government support to repeal or amend the law, as many had hoped it would, but the premier invited journalists and lawmakers to propose well-studied amendments for discussion.

'Public opinion against unity'

(Continued from page 1)

The 1974 Rabat Summit recognised the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

In public remarks two years ago, King Hussein stated that he rejected an Israeli offer in the 1970s to restore 98 per cent of the West Bank to the Kingdom.

The Al Arab Al Yawm poll highlighted various trends within Jordan's 4.6 million population, of which more than half are of Palestinian origin.

Communities of Palestinian origin are concentrated in Amman, whose residents make up one-third of the overall population.

The poll showed that 50.4 per cent of the polled Ammanites were against a confederation with the West Bank. This percentage soared to 75.6 per cent in Bakqa and Karak and slid to 35 per cent in Irbid, the second largest city with nearly 800,000 inhabitants.

Moreover, 54.3 per cent of the polled Ammanites were against a potential rotating presidency between the West Bank and Jordan in the event of unity.

Responding to another possibility, 82.2 per cent of the polled sample rejected the notion of a tripartite Jordanian-Israeli-Palestinian confederation.

The poll did not specify age preferences. Although it categorised the polled sample into age groups ranging from 20 to over 40 years, the poll did not outline the "in favour" and "against" percentages of senior citizens who witnessed the unity before 1967.

JORDAN TELEVISION

19:10News headlines
19:35Doc. — Perspective
20:00 News in Arabic (Channel 2 links up with channel 1)
20:30 Programme on the late His Majesty King Hussein
21:00Islamic History in Jordan
21:30On the Banks of Jordan
22:00News in English
22:10 Doc. — National Geographic
23:00News in Arabic (Channel 2 links up with channel 1)

PRAYER TIMES

04:26Fajr
05:43(Sunrise) Doha
11:45Dhuhr
15:09Asr
17:46Maghreb
17:03Isha

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Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
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JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

RJ Flight Information.....44-53300
Queen Alia Int. Airport.....44-53300

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery.....5921199
The Islamic Abdi.....5661317
Husseini Medical Centre.....5858856
Luzmila.....4630195
Khalidi Maternity.....4642816
Aklieh Maternity.....4642412
Jabal Amman Maternity.....4642362
Malhas, J. Amman.....4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani.....5607071
Shmeisani Hospital.....5607431
Jordan Hospital.....5607550
University Hospital.....5353444
Al-Muhsen Hospital.....5667227
Al-Ahli, Abdali.....5661646
Italian, Al-Muhajreen.....4771013
Al-Bashir.....4775111
Army, Marka.....4891611
Queen Alia Hospital.....5157100
Amal Hospital.....5607155
Al-Amal Cancer Centre.....5353000

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital.....(09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital.....(09)900560
Ton Sina Hospital.....(09)986731
Al Hikma Modern Hospital.....(09)990990

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital (02)275555
Roman Catholic Hospital (02)272275
Ton Al Nafees Hospital

(02)7101372, (02)7103101
Rosary Sisters Hospital
(02)7102831, (02)7102011
Specialty Hospital (02)7103100

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) Information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone 44 (52700). Information on Royal Wings flights can be supplied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:15Sanaa (RJ)
08:35Jeddah (RJ)
08:50Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
09:00Jeddah (add) (RJ)
09:30New Delhi (RJ)
10:05Beirut, Damascus (RJ)
16:20Cairo (RJ)
16:25London (RJ)
16:45 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
18:20Kuwait (RJ)
18:35Casablanca, Tunis (RJ)

20:25Bangkok, Doha (RJ)
23:15Tel Aviv (add) (RJ)
02:00Jeddah (add) (RJ)
04:45 Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok (RJ)

Other Flights

04:10London (BA)
08:20Alexandria (BA)
09:30Cairo (MS)
10:00Khartoum (SD)
11:30Sanaa (IY)
12:45Kiev (6U)
13:20Bahrain (GF)
14:45Doha (QR)
15:05Vienna (OS)
15:25Dubai, Abu Dhabi (EK)
17:50Istanbul (SD)
18:40Beirut (ME)
20:05Tel Aviv (LY)
20:30Frankfurt, Damascus (LH)
01:25Athens (OA)
02:00Milan (AZ)

DEPARTURES

Royal Wings (RW)
08:50Agaba (arriving at QAIA)
17:30 Gaza (arriving at QAIA)
18:00 Agaba (arriving at Marka Airport)
23:15 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA)
RW1

06:15 Beirut, Damascus (add) (RJ)
10:45Frankfurt, London (RJ)
11:30 Shannon, Chicago (RJ)
12:30Kuwait (RJ)
12:30Cairo (RJ)
20:15Bahrain, Doha (RJ)
20:45 Abu Dhabi, Tehran (RJ)
21:00Tel Aviv (add) (RJ)
21:00Jeddah (add) (RJ)
21:15Dubai, Muscat (RJ)
21:20Damascus (RJ)

Other Flights

04:45Alexandria (BA)
06:00Istanbul (TK)
07:25Paris (AF)
09:05London (BA)
10:30Cairo (MS)
11:05Istanbul (SD)
12:30Paris (IY)
14:00Kiev (6U)
14:10Bahrain (GF)
15:35Doha (QR)
15:50Vienna (OS)
16:30Dubai (EK)
18:50Khartoum (SD)
20:00Beirut (ME)
20:50Tel Aviv (LY)
02:45Athens (OA)
03:00Milan (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW)

08:30 Agaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
13:30 Gaza (from Marka Airport) (RW)
20:30Agaba (from QAIA) (RW)
21:00Tel Aviv (from QAIA) (RW)



HER MAJESTY Queen Noor Sunday received U.S. ambassadors Roscoe Suddarth and Richard Murphy at Bab Al Salam Palace. Ambassador Suddarth, president of the Middle East Institute, and Ambassador Murphy, a senior fellow for the Middle East at the institute, paid their respects to the Queen and expressed their deep sorrow over the death of His Majesty the late King Hussein. Ambassador Suddarth served as ambassador to Jordan from 1987-1990, while Ambassador Murphy was the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs from 1983-1989. U.S. Ambassador William Burns attended the meeting. Later, ambassadors Suddarth and Murphy held a tribute to King Hussein at the American embassy, entitled, "Remembering King Hussein: A Retrospective of Jordanian-American Relations."

JTC to issue new tender for school Internet project

By Ghadeer Taber

AMMAN — The Jordan Telecommunications Corporation (JTC) is preparing terms of reference to issue a tender to connect public schools to the Internet reversing a decision to award the multi-million dollar contract to an American company, said Telecommunications Minister Jamal Sarairoh Sunday.

"The JTC and its consultants are preparing the terms of reference so we can issue an open tender in line with the Audit Bureau's guidelines...The documents should be prepared within two weeks," said the minister, who was faced with two key resignations in the telecommunications sector almost immediately after taking office.

The government last week accepted the resignation of Jordan Telecommunications Company Chairman Ali Shukri, who accused Sarairoh of interference in the JTC's affairs. In his resignation letter, Shukri said the minister had ordered the JTC to suspend the Internet project, a charge denied by Sarairoh.

Almost immediately after Shukri stepped down, Yousef

Abu Jamous, director general of the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) submitted his resignation over policy differences with the minister. The TRC official could not be reached for comment Sunday.

JTC's board of directors had decided to award the Internet project to the American firm Ascend for \$10 million without going through proper Audit Bureau guidelines for awarding contracts, said an official requesting anonymity.

But, a senior JTC official told the Jordan Times yesterday that "while the final decision to award the contract has not been made, Ascend had the best offer, scoring the highest in the technical and financial evaluations." He said Ascend had given a 35 per cent discount on the original offer bringing the price down to \$6.5 million with a five to seven-year repayment plan with interest at London Inter Bank Offered Rate (LIBOR) plus 1.75 per cent.

Four international companies submitted offers when the tender was issued several months ago, but some industry experts questioned the method in which the contract was awarded.

"Ascend scored 94.6 per cent out of 100 in the financial and technical combined with (the other offers by) Nortel 90.3 per cent, NCR Corporation 84.9 per cent and Siemens with 64.9 per cent," said the JTC official.

Telechoice of the U.S. and Omnitel of Finland acted as consultants on the tender.

The late King Hussein, in a letter praising the JTC's achievements, directed that the country's public schools be connected to the Internet and that a nationwide mobile service network be launched.

The government official said the Cabinet will also review a tender issued by the state-owned JTC last month for a mobile phone service network. Five international firms submitted offers to set up and provide equipment for the Global System Mobile (GSM) project.

Sarairoh refused to comment Sunday on Abu Jamous' resignation. However, in Sunday's Al Arab Al Yawm newspaper, the minister said the TRC director general did not resign. In the same article Abu Jamous confirmed reports of his resignation saying he had "sharp differences" with Sarairoh.

Belgian beauties return home

By Rana Awwad

AMMAN — Twenty Belgian models, including Miss Belgium 1998, returned home on Saturday after spending nine days in Jordan to shoot video clips in preparation for their country's 1999 beauty title.

Their trip is expected to boost Jordan's tourism industry ahead of the Millennium by drawing Europe's attention.

The models were accompanied by two TV stations, 15 journalists, cameramen, producers, directors and personal assistants while "striking a pose" at Jordan's key natural, historic and archaeological sites.

The videos, depicting Amman's Roman Amphitheatre, the Dead Sea, the Greco-Roman city of Jerash, Ajloun,

the Nabatean-built city of Petra, Madaba, Wadi Rum, the Ma'in Spa and the Red Sea resort of Aqaba, will be screened during the Miss Belgium 1999 contest on March 26.

"Jordan is the first country in the Middle East to be chosen for this kind of event," said Ziad Dakkak, managing director of Dakkak Tours and Travel Agency which coordinated the models' trip to Jordan.

"We have been working on this project for more than a year. We first invited the Miss Belgium 1998 Committee to the Kingdom while it was searching for a new destination for this year's video clip shooting," he told the Jordan Times in an interview.

"We hosted the event in co-operation with the Ministry of

Tourism, Jordan Tourism Board, the Movenpick Hotel, Taybet Zaman and JETT," said Dakkak.

The contest will be broadcast live throughout Europe. The first 30 minutes will show a short documentary on Jordan's tourist attractions, a move officials hope will swell the number of European guests to Jordan.

"The documentary will also talk about the achievements of the late King Hussein and will talk about His Majesty King Abdullah," said Dakkak.

"The fact that Jordan was selected among all other countries as the location to shoot the clips means it will have a positive impact on promoting Jordan's tourism industry ahead of celebrations to mark the start of the third Millennium," he said.

PM refutes speculations about altering school texts

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — Parliament on Sunday debated political, economic and social issues during its ordinary session which was attended by Prime Minister Abdur-Rauf S. Rawabdeh.

During the session, Rawabdeh refuted speculations about the government's intention to remove verses of the Holy Quran that criticise Jews from the curriculum of government schools and described such statements as "baseless."

"No verse will be removed from the curriculum, and anybody who commits such thing is a faithless apostate," Rawabdeh told the 80-member House during the ordinary session.

"The peace treaty [with Israel] creates relations between two states, but never make us abandon our history and faith," the prime minister told lawmakers. "We will never allow a treaty to change our tradition and faith."

Rawabdeh was responding to a question from Deputy Abdul Razzaq Nsour who demanded a clarification from the government about speculations that the Ministry of Education was planning to rewrite textbooks, removing certain verses from the Quran that lash out at the Jews.

"Jordanian citizens will not accept that anyone tampers with our faith and history despite that

we have approved the peace treaty," Nsour, a pro-government deputy, said.

In the past few weeks, local newspapers have repeatedly published reports about government plans to remove verses attacking Jews from the school curriculum in line with the peace treaty signed between Jordan and Israel in October 1994. The treaty requires each country to refrain from propaganda or incitement against the other.

Rawabdeh also told deputies the introduction of a two-day weekend is not among his government's priorities and said talks will be held with the banking sector to overcome differences resulting from the imple-

mentation of the new weekend scheme in the financial sector.

A fracas erupted following the Central Bank of Jordan's instructions to banks to implement a five-day work week and two-day weekend (Friday and Saturday). Bank employees have criticised the new scheme because it increases working hours by three additional hours a week to compensate for the additional day off.

Bank employees, especially women and those living outside the capital, complain that the new instructions will create familial problems because they will arrive home late.

In another development, Information Minister Nasser

Lawzi said that the government will submit its policy statement on April 3 following the Royal Decree to extend the Parliament's current ordinary session to enable the MPs to discuss the vote of confidence on Rawabdeh's government.

Lawzi said the government will submit its policy statement to Parliament on April 3. The confidence vote is scheduled for April 10. According to the Constitution, the government should submit its policy statement within 30 days of its formation.

The current Parliament session ends on March 27. The minister said the session will be extended by Royal Decree to April 15.

Environment ministry to sign agreement to clean up environmental hazard in Ruseifeh

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — The government today will sign a JD972,000 agreement with a local company as part of a long-awaited effort to solve environmental dangers posed by a cesspit near Ruseifeh, known to be highly contaminated with industrial and domestic wastewater.

The Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment will sign the deal with the company, which recently won the project tender to develop and treat the pit, commonly known as the "Pepsi pool."

The cesspit sits in the heart of a populated and industrialised area east of Ruseifeh. The pit itself was naturally formed and lays at the bottom of a small valley. But industrial dumping, mainly by the mineral and soft drink industries, and wastewater leaked from residential

areas have created a dangerous situation, environmentalists and officials say.

During winter, rainfall often causes the pit to overflow into the surrounding residential area, posing an environmental hazard to citizens and workers, the added.

Residents have long complained of foul smells emanating from the site and of the spread of community diseases because of the pit's low hygienic standard. They said both adults and children have drowned while attempting to swim in the pool.

"Although it [the pool] is not too deep, two friends drowned in there last year as the slime strongly dragged down, and they could not make it out," Ibrahim Abu Ras, a Ruseifeh resident, told the Jordan Times.

Director General of the Ministry of Public Works' Tenders Department Nasser Madadba said

the project to treat the pit aims at "fundamentally" solving the issue.

"Despite all former efforts to solve this dangerous and difficult situation, the problem still exists, however, we hope that the plan will be the beginning of the end," Madadba said.

According to the contract, the local company will recycle the water and then use the treated water to irrigate trees around the area. A public park will be established after the area is rehabilitated.

The pit will be filled with water and used for boating. But officials could not be reached to confirm from where the water for the pit will be extracted.

Around 78 groceries, a 300-metre-square health club with a large swimming pool and halls for social activities will be constructed in the area.

Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment Tawfiq Kreishan, ministry officials and technicians and company representatives are expected to inspect the site today.

Last year, the government said it would relocate the 800-dunum Ruseifeh garbage dump — another "serious" environmental problem facing residents — to a nearby \$25 million site by the year 2000.

The dump — originally designed to receive approximately 3,000 tonnes of garbage per day from Amman, Zarqa and Ruseifeh, which together are home to nearly half of Jordan's 4.6 million people — is filled beyond capacity, posing real threats to the environment.

A forest is slated to be planted on the site of the present garbage dump. The new 500-dunum refuse heap would be situated in

the Jundi area, 15 kilometres from Ruseifeh.

The United Nations Development Programme will fund half of a \$5.5 million waste management pilot project in Ruseifeh to help cut pollution, turn the site's solid waste into fertilisers and generate electricity by exploiting methane gas from waste emissions.

The UNDP will provide \$2.5 million of the total cost, while \$1.5 million will come from Denmark and \$1.5 million from Jordan.

Last year, Japan also said it would provide \$16 million to construct a mobile incinerator near Swaga to dispose of medical waste.

The country's hospitals have long asked for a general incinerator to eliminate thousands of tonnes of such waste.

South African ambassador prepares to end tour of duty

AMMAN (J.T.) — South African Ambassador to Jordan Henry De Bruyn who was taken ill a few months ago is recuperating at home in Pretoria, embassy officials said Sunday.

His wife, Sophia T. Williams De Bruyn, who returned to Amman to arrange the diplomatic couple's return to home base, leaves Jordan today, after saying farewell to the embassy staff, Jordanian officials and the diplomatic corps.

Henry De Bruyn was South Africa's first ambassador to Jordan after the two countries established full diplomatic ties following the democratic election of Nelson Mandela as president of the republic in 1994.

He took up his post in April 1995.

The South African experience was always of particular interest to Jordanian officials, politicians and analysts. As a member of the African National Council and a close personal friend of Mandela, and having been jailed, tossed into exile where he received military training, and returned to his native land to fight for

the rights of all the peoples of his country, De Bruyn provided concerned parties in Jordan with in-depth, first-hand experience into South Africa's ending of apartheid and move towards democracy.

Also during his tenure, De Bruyn sought to encourage bilateral commercial and tourism interests. Several delegations paid official visits to his country, and tourist groups from Jordan to South Africa began to witness an increase.

Yesterday, members of the Diplomatic Spouses' Club of Jordan along with Jordanian and expatriate associates and friends, gathered at the home of Liesbeth Tangelder, wife of Netherlands Ambassador to Jordan Bernard Tangelder, to say farewell to the De Bruyns.

The De Bruyns were scheduled to end their tour of duty in Jordan next month.

A new ambassador is expected to be named soon. Meanwhile the embassy is being overseen by Chargé d'Affaires Schoeman du Plessis.

Jordan to press Israel to allow family visits to prisoners for 'Eid Al Adha'

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan is to press Israel to release the remaining Jordanian prisoners in Israeli jails and plans to organise a visit by the prisoners' relatives to visit them during the upcoming Al Adha feast.

The announcement was made Sunday after a meeting between Prime Minister Abdur-Rauf S. Rawabdeh and the chairman and members of the Public Freedoms and Citizens Rights Committee in the Lower House of Parliament. Committee members urged the prime minister to take steps to secure the release of the 14 remaining prisoners.

Committee Chairman Mohamad Azaideh was quoted by the Jordan News Agency (Petra) as saying that Rawabdeh displayed deep concern for and understanding of the prisoners' question.

The prime minister said Jordan will spare no effort to secure the release of Jordanian prisoners, noting that he has already instructed Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib to intensify contacts with the Israeli government to arrange the Eid Al Adha near the end of March, Azaideh said.

Last October, the prisoners were visited by their relatives who issued a statement afterwards saying that the inmates suffer from serious health problems. They urged the government to intercede to secure their freedom.

Israel says the 14 Jordanians jailed in the last 10 years have been convicted of serious offences, such as fatal attacks on Israelis, and insists that they serve their prison terms in Israeli territory. Jordan is seeking their hand-

dover to Jordanian custody.

Most of the Jordanian prisoners in Israel were freed more than a year ago in exchange for the release of two Mossad agents who in late 1997 attempted to assassinate Khaled Mishaal, a senior member of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas.

It is believed that in addition to the 14 Jordanians imprisoned on security charges, there are six more held in Israel for alleged criminal offences.

According to Azaideh, his committee discussed with Rawabdeh the question of Jordanian political detainees in Jordan.

He said the prime minister has promised to study their cases and the charges levelled against them, and to settle their cases as soon as possible.

What's Going On

TRIBUTE

* Tribute over the passing of the late His Majesty King Hussein, sponsored by the Circassian community in Jordan, at Al Ahli Club, Eighth Circle at 6:00 p.m.

TV PROGRAMME

* Special interview with economist Taher Kan'an on Jordan Television Channel 2 at 8:30 p.m. (conducted in English with subtitles in Arabic). This interview commemorates the life and legacy of the late His Majesty King Hussein.

Camp residents welcome better living conditions under new government plan

'Only a few, who live outside the camps and try to politicise the issue, are questioning the improvement'

By Dana Charkasi

IRBID — Impoverished residents of two Palestinian refugee camps in northern Jordan say they are looking forward to improvements in services under a 10-year Social Productivity Programme (SPP) planned by the government.

The plan, launched in 1998, will try to improve the living standards of Jordanians, including Palestinian refugees, in a country where one in every five citizens lives below the poverty line.

The Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA), which looks after 13 camps housing Palestinian refugees and displaced Palestinians from the 1948 and 1967 wars with Israel, has promised to implement infrastructure projects worth JD3 million in the Martyr Azmi Al-Mufti and Irbid camps in northern Jordan over the next three years.

"We don't see anything of these improvements," Zeina Jabary, a resident of the Mufti camp told the Jordan Times during a tour of camps sponsored by the DPA.

A local police officer was taking notes of the journalists' names and questions to officials and residents of the camp.

"Rats are running around. Yesterday I found one behind the door of our sleeping room," she added, pointing in open sewage system next to the house's main entrance.

"Once I got bitten by a rat."

The Mufti camp is one of three camps lacking a proper sewage system. There, wastewater drains off via simple pipes from inside the resident's shabby homes to an open cement gully in the midst of walking paths where children play near the smelly stream of waste water.

In some areas, wastewater, draining off a sudden ending gully,

oozes away in unpaved, sandy spots.

Nidal Haddad, director of the regional office of the DPA in Irbid governorate, said the department will spend JD1.8 million on building a sewage network in the Mufti camp.

"We expect that the system to be finished after 14 months," he told reporters, showing them design papers.

In the first three years of the SPP, money will be spent on infrastructure projects across Jordan and in the last seven years on social schemes to ease the impact of poverty and unemployment.

The plan has been criticised by many refugees who fear it will lead to their permanent settlement in Jordan if they ever win their right to return to homes they left in 1948 in what is now Israel proper.

But DPA officials have rejected such claims.

"Improvements to the Palestinian camps are not part of a nationalisation plan, but a responsibility Jordan undertakes towards refugees who enjoy full citizenship rights," DPA Director General Ibrahim Badran told reporters prior to the tour, designed to draw public attention to the department's role.

Jordan, home to 1.5 million U.N.-registered refugees — around 42 per cent of all Palestinian refugees — spends around JD350 million a year on the camps each year, Badran added.

Only 18 per cent of the refugee population live in camps. The rest have moved out to nearby cities and towns.

Like elsewhere in Jordan, unemployment — officially estimated at 16 per cent and unofficially at up to 27 per cent — is a chronic problem for camp dwellers.

"When the Gulf countries were

open, many of us worked there, supporting families in the camp. But after the Gulf crisis, 250 families returned from Kuwait to the camp," said Abu Kamal, one of the camps' nobles.

He was referring to the return of over 250,000 Jordanians of Palestinian origin from Kuwait during and after the crisis, sparked by Iraq's invasion of the Gulf Arab state.

Haddad said the camp's potable water network needs modernisation while roads and houses need maintenance.

The Mufti camp is in dire need of street lights, and its only centre for the handicapped requires more funds to provide space and specially-designed furniture for children.

Like in most other camps, residents said they needed a round-the-clock emergency health centre.

A local health clinic, run by the

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) closes at 2:00 p.m. "If somebody falls seriously sick after two o'clock, we have to take him to the Princess Basma Hospital 15 kilometres away," said one resident.

"And when someone dies, we have no special car to transport the body, so we have to transport it on the roof of a private car," said another.

Haddad said camp residents do not perceive such improvements as a path to "permanent settlement."

"No one inside the camp has said that," he said. "Only a few who live outside the camp try to politicise the issue are questioning the improvements."

At the nearby Irbid camp, home to 30,000 people, infrastructure facilities were much better than at the 15,000-strong Mufti camp.

Besides minor improvements to the rain drainage system and the upgrading of the electricity network, many complained about the worsening financial situation of UNRWA, which has affected the quality of services.

UNRWA, facing a chronic budget deficit of \$60 million annually, is responsible for offering basic health, education and other relief services to refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"For example, a specialist for heart disease and an eye specialist left last year and UNRWA has not been able to replace them because they say they don't have enough money," Qasem, Abdul Malik Darawsheh, director of the DPA improvement committee in Irbid, told reporters.

UNRWA has been lobbying donors for increased funds to maintain services that have been

unable to match the annual population growth in the camps.

"We have financial problems," said Mansur Saqr, public information officer at UNRWA office in Amman.

"Last year, a budget of \$314 million was approved by the U.N. General Assembly, but we only received \$250 million. We need at least \$265 million in order to keep our operations running," he added.

"We would like to improve our services for the 3.5 million refugees in our five countries of operation and to increase the salaries of our 22,000 staff," Saqr said. "But it's impossible. Donors expect us to provide the same services with less money."

Palestinian refugees have been assimilated in Jordan, which insists it will keep pushing for the refugees' right to return to their homes or to compensation in line with U.N. resolutions.

Afghan foes agree to share power

ASHGABAT (R) — Afghanistan's warring factions agreed Sunday after three days of U.N.-mediated talks to share power and work to hammer out a permanent ceasefire.

Representatives of the ruling Islamic Taliban militia and the opposition coalition based in northern Afghanistan told a joint news briefing in the Turkmen capital Ashgabat they would meet again in Afghanistan to thrash out the details.

"In order to join both the groups, we have agreed to have a shared executive, a shared legislature and a shared judiciary," Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil, leader of the three-man delegation from the purist Islamic Taliban, announced through an interpreter.

The agreement, reached after intense, secret talks which often lasted well into the night, also called for the exchange of 20 prisoners each.

Despite the broad nature of a statement released, both sides were optimistic.

"I am optimistic and hopeful that at the next round of talks we will be able to announce a permanent ceasefire in Afghanistan," said Mohammad Younus Qanouni, a senior opposition figure and head of their four-man group, through a translator.

He said that the atmosphere of trust and confidence established at the secluded botanical gardens complex where the negotia-

tions took place had led him to believe that a joint government and an end to hostilities were within reach.

Muttawakil was also upbeat, saying a permanent ceasefire would automatically follow any establishment of a shared power structure.

"When we agree on the details and personnel of the government then we can agree to have a ceasefire," he said.

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the only countries to recognise the Taliban government, which controls more than 90 per cent of Afghan territory. Islamabad was quick to hail the agreement.

"It's a very good start for finding a negotiated solution to establish durable peace in Afghanistan," Pakistani Foreign Minister Saad bin Zafar told Reuters in Islamabad.

The delegations, looking tired, said any shared power structure would represent different ethnic groups. The contentious issue of how the government would be divided up between them had yet to be finalised, they added.

Qanouni said autonomy for some ethnic groups within Afghanistan was not currently on the agenda.

"Our definition of a broad-based government means a strong central government where everybody is represented," he said.

He added that special task forces may be established to iron out technical questions

which had yet to be addressed. The delegations said the next round would take place some time after the Id-e-Qurban Muslim holiday in around two weeks' time.

While representing a significant step towards ending years of bloodshed, the Ashgabat accord is only the start of what promises to be a delicate process.

As if to underline the fragility of the situation in war-torn Afghanistan, the Taliban delegation confirmed that there had been some preparations for further military offensives, but that they were "not that considerable."

U.N. sources confirmed that there had been "low-level fighting" between the sides during the talks, a fact both delegations recognised.

But the acting head of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMIA), Andrew Tesoriere, said that in spite of the work ahead, there was clearly cause for hope.

In summing up the talks, he said: "These talks we sincerely hope mark a watershed, because they address not only confidence-building measures, but also fundamental issues regarding the future of Afghanistan."

Qanouni said: "We have had talks and negotiations in the past. This is the first time we have been able to create an atmosphere of trust and take a step towards a political solution to the Afghan crisis."



Pro-Serb demonstrators carry banners and flags as they take part in a protest over the resumption of the Kosovo peace talks, in front of the Palais de Chaillot on Paris' Trocadero. After the initial round of talks in Rambouillet ended with only a partial solution, Serb and ethnic Albanian delegations will return to Paris' Kieher Conference Centre next week for fresh talks (Reuters photo)

Kosovo peace talks to resume under gathering gloom

PARIS (R) — Kosovo peace talks resume in Paris Monday after bombs killed seven people in the province and Western states appeared less united than before last month's dead-end negotiations in Rambouillet.

Ethnic Albanians struggling for independence from Belgrade and Serbian delegates determined to block them were due to gather in an elegant conference centre for another round of armistice talks mediated by three foreign diplomats.

The first round of proximity talks adjourned after 17 days in an isolated chateau with the ethnic Albanian close to signing a peace accord but the Belgrade delegation firmly opposed to its plan to station outside peace-keeping forces in Kosovo.

Ethnic Albanians have since agreed to the plan, even if the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) has not yet officially declared whether it will accept its provisions for autonomy within Serbia rather than the independence it has fought for.

But Yugoslavia's strongman President Slobodan Milosevic again said "no" last week after an eight-hour arm-twisting session with U.S. Balkan troubleshooter Richard Holbrooke.

Already divided among themselves at the Rambouillet talks, Western powers trying to impose peace in the majority

Albanian province seemed less sure this time around about how to bring their will to bear on Milosevic.

"What is noticeable now is not that the Western countries are divided among themselves — they are united in their absence of a strategic vision," said Dominique Moisi, deputy director of the French Institute of International Affairs.

Moisi said Milosevic did not want to sign the agreement and did not seem to think he would have to, despite the threats of NATO bombing the Western powers have tried to use as a lever.

"He does not believe that NATO will bomb," he said.

"He says to himself that the West does not really want that. They don't know what they want." But the year-long fighting threatened to escalate if nothing happened, he added: "With the arrival of spring, the massive rearming of the Kosovo Albanians and the strong military presence of the Serbs, one can well imagine that a new war will start on a much larger scale."

The bloodshed picked up dramatically Saturday, when bomb blasts in two Kosovo towns killed at least seven people.

At least 2,000 people have died in the fighting in the past year.

The ethnic Albanian delegation landed in Paris

Saturday and their Serbian counterparts were due to arrive Sunday.

The three mediators — Christopher Hill of the United States, Russia's Boris Mayorkin and Austrian Wolfgang Petritsch for the European Union — planned to meet Sunday evening with contact group officials to work out a schedule for the talks.

The contact group sponsoring the "proximity talks," a formula chosen because the two delegations usually refuse to meet each other, includes the U.S., Russia, Germany, France, Britain and Italy.

Mediators and delegates, who were cloistered around the clock in the Rambouillet chateau last month, will sleep in Paris hotels during these talks and negotiate in the Kieher conference centre near the Arc de Triomphe.

The envoys said the talks were expected to last three or four days because the only real issue to discuss was whether Belgrade would accept 28,000 NATO-led peace-keeping troops.

Unlike in Rambouillet, when a deadline passed without triggering the threatened NATO bombing raids, the contact group has not set a deadline for these talks.

"The trouble with a deadline is that nothing happens until the deadline," British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said Saturday.

NEWS IN BRIEF

EU ministers to send rights team to China

REINHARTSHAUSEN, Germany (R) — European Union foreign ministers agreed Sunday to send a delegation to Beijing to discuss human rights before deciding whether to propose a U.N. resolution criticising China's rights record. Senior foreign ministry officials from three of the 15 EU member states — the so-called executive troika of Germany, Austria and Finland — will be in Beijing Tuesday, an EU diplomat told reporters during a ministerial summit in Germany. "All options are open, including the option of criticising China," he said. "The EU wants to define a common position by March 22." On that date, the U.N. commission on human rights opens its annual six-week session and, not for the first time, European states are torn between criticising the Communist power's human rights record and seeking to secure trading ties with its rapidly expanding economy. Last year, Denmark proposed a motion censuring China and promptly suffered economic sanctions imposed by Beijing. The major EU powers held back from confrontation with Beijing.

EU in new initiative to rescue ASEAN talks

ELTVILLE (AFP) — European Union foreign ministers Sunday agreed a new initiative aimed at salvaging the bloc's relations with ASEAN, currently soured by a row over contacts with Myanmar, diplomats said. At talks here the ministers proposed downgrading a planned EU-ASEAN meeting in Berlin at the end of the month in the hope that this will enable it to go ahead. The talks, due to take place at foreign-minister level, currently look certain to be scrapped because of ASEAN's refusal to accept the EU's position that Myanmar's foreign minister cannot attend. Under the proposal adopted Sunday, the talks would go ahead but instead of all 15 member states being present, the EU would be represented by a troika of Austria, Germany and Finland. The hope is that this would persuade the seven original ASEAN members to take part without Myanmar, which joined ASEAN in 1997.

Chinese police break up dissident meeting, arrest at least three

BEIJING (AFP) — Chinese police Sunday broke up a meeting of the opposition China Democracy Party (CDP) in the eastern city of Hangzhou and arrested at least three party members, dissident sources said. The Hong Kong-based Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said several party members had arranged to meet in a tea house in the city to discuss ways to improve human rights in China. But the centre said police broke up the meeting and arrested several militants, including Wang Rongqing, Zhu Yufu and Zhu Zhengming. The activists had not been released by Sunday afternoon. The government has vowed to preserve social stability in the face of growing unemployment and rural unrest, and began a crackdown on all forms of political dissent at the end of last year. CDP founder Wang Youcai was jailed at the end of December for 11 years after tabling an official request for legal recognition of the fledgling opposition party.

China to bring in new laws on procurement to smash corruption

BEIJING (AFP) — China plans to introduce new legislation to regulate government purchases of goods and services in a bid to stamp out corruption, the official media reported Sunday. The China Daily said legislation to regulate procurement nationwide had been placed on the agenda of the standing committee of the parliament, the National People's Congress (NPC). A drafting group is to be set up next month and legislation should be passed before 2003, Wang Weidong, deputy director of the state council office affairs management bureau, told the paper. Wang said the move to draft the new laws was part of a wider drive to combat waste and corruption. "For decades there have been problems in government purchasing. One official made decisions for his or her department after private bargaining with a retailer or wholesaler, leading to instances of inefficiency, corruption and abuses of monopoly power," said the paper. It added that for the "first time in decades" the government would this year also buy services and allocate engineering contracts through public bidding. The paper said goods and services to be bought through bidding this year would include automobiles, insurance and conference catering.

Body of French hostage found dead in Colombia flown home

METZ, France (AFP) — The body of a French oil technician found dead after being kidnapped by leftist rebels in Colombia has been flown back to his family in Porcelette, eastern France, town officials said Sunday. A church funeral service for Claude Steinmetz, whose autopsy in Colombia suggested he died of "natural causes" during his captivity, is scheduled for Tuesday, the town's deputy mayor, Bernard Drui, told AFP. Guerrillas of the National Liberation Army (ELN), the smaller of two leftist guerrilla forces fighting a war against the Colombian government, abducted Steinmetz, 42, in November. The Red Cross said Steinmetz's body was turned over to it last week. The technician's family said negotiations had been underway "since November with the hostage-takers," who sought an undisclosed ransom. The French oil service firm Geoservice, which employed Steinmetz in Colombia, denied reports of negotiations last week. Steinmetz had been working at Cupiagua, 250 kilometres east of Bogota, and wandered beyond the site's security perimeter when rebels grabbed him, officials said. Steinmetz's family is seeking further information of the circumstances surrounding his death. The coroner in Colombia turned the autopsy over to the French embassy in Bogota.

11 people killed in road accident

NEW DELHI, India (AP) — A carriage attached to a tractor overturned Sunday in northwestern India, killing at least 11 people and injuring 40 others, United News of India news agency said. Five people were hospitalised in critical condition, UNI quoted doctors as saying. In India, the villagers often travel in the carriage meant to carry farm produce. The accident occurred as the villagers were returning home after attending a religious fair near Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan state, 250 kilometres south of New Delhi.

Gunmen abduct Sri Lankan journalist

COLOMBO (AFP) — Armed men abducted a Sri Lankan journalist responsible for exposing corruption in the military and pushed him out of a vehicle after beating him here Sunday, his colleagues said.

The gunmen had first cut the telephone lines to the home of Nilal Priyantha, the defence correspondent of the Sinhalese language weekly The Lakshma and abducted him in a four-wheel drive vehicle, the colleagues said.

"I believe he was attacked because of his writings exposing corruption in the defence establishment," Priyantha's editor, Bandula Padmakumara, told AFP.

"The attack could be for any of his (recent) articles," Priyantha's editor, Bandula Padmakumara, told AFP.

Priyantha's report of an alleged abduction and assault against a young couple by an army brigadier was the front-page headline story in Sunday's Lakshma, which usually is sold at newsstands a day earlier on Saturdays.

Editor Padmakumara was previously charged with criminally defaming President Chandrika Kumaratunga but was acquitted.

However, the government has appealed that

judgement and the appeal is expected to be heard on March 23, Padmakumara added.

He said he believed those mentioned in Priyantha's exposes may have been involved in Sunday's pre-dawn attack.

The gunmen had pushed Priyantha out of the vehicle after severely beating him and placing two plastic bags over his head in a bid to suffocate him, Padmakumara said.

The journalist was in shock and unable to speak with his colleagues as he was taken to a Colombo hospital shortly after being found abandoned on a roadside.

The local media watchdog, the Free Media Movement (FMM), strongly condemned the attack and accused the government of creating an environment which compromised the safety of journalists.

"Senior government ministers led by President Chandrika Kumaratunga have launched a campaign of abuse against independent media organisations and selected independent journalists after the media exposed widespread rigging of votes in the provincial council elections in the north western province on Jan. 25," the FMM said.

It said the verbal attacks only encouraged those within and outside the government to use violence against journalists who exposed wrongdoing.

The FMM urged the government to investigate the latest attack but at the same time warned the authorities may not probe the case properly and "sweep it under the carpet" as in similar incidents in the past decade.

Police said they had already started an investigation.

Sunday's abduction and assault was the latest in a recent string of attacks against journalists critical of the government and the military.

In June last year, an editor of a newspaper highly critical of the government escaped death when gunmen burst into his home and sprayed it with bullets.

Unidentified attackers fired about 40 rounds with automatic assault rifles at Lasantha Wickrematunga, the chief editor of the Sunday Leader weekly.

Gunmen also attacked the home of senior journalist Iqbal Attas but in that case several airforce personnel were arrested and now face criminal charges.

Helicopters pick up foreign skiers believed missing

SRINAGAR, India (AP) — Military helicopters went to the rescue Sunday after authorities lost contact with a civilian chopper carrying a group of foreign tourists in India's troubled Kashmir state, but the alarm turned out to be unfounded.

Military spokesman Maj. P. Purshottam said the 10 unidentified skiers from France, Switzerland and Germany were

picked up unharmed by one of two military helicopters sent to search for them in the mountains near the state capital, Srinagar. While authorities feared they were missing, they had completed a spectacular ski run and were trekking as planned to a village.

A tourist helicopter had flown them to a nearly inaccessible spot at 4,800 metres for the ski run Saturday.

The tourist helicopter then lost contact with ground authorities, causing concern. Srinagar is the centre of a Muslim uprising that erupted in 1989. A dozen groups are fighting for secession from India for the mainly Hindu country's only Muslim-majority state, and some of the militants have targeted foreign tourists.

Two military helicopters took off from Srinagar for Gund, 80

kilometres east of Srinagar, at daybreak Sunday.

Soldiers on board spotted the skiers and picked them up, Purshottam said. The civilian helicopter later resumed contact with authorities on the ground after fixing a communications problem.

The government has said it has the uprising under control. As part of efforts to promote tourism in Kashmir, a

government helicopter recently began flying skiers to Himalayan peaks.

Four Western tourists have been missing since armed militants kidnapped them in Kashmir in 1995. There have since been unconfirmed reports that the kidnappers executed Donald Hutchings of Spokane, Washington; Dirk Hasert of Erfurt, Germany; Keith Mangan of Middle-

Paul Wells of London.

A little known group based in neighbouring Pakistan and calling itself Al Faran claimed responsibility for the abductions and demanded the release of 21 Muslim guerrilla leaders in exchange for the hostages. The Indian government refused the exchange, saying that would encourage more kidnappings.

Street violence sweeps Basque country

MADRID, Spain (AP) — Enraged by the arrest of Basque separatist leaders, assailants hurled Molotov cocktails and set off a homemade explosive in the worst weekend of street violence since the armed group ETA declared a cease-fire six months ago, news reports said Sunday.

State radio reported 17 incidents across the Basque country of northern Spain. A spokesman for the regional police said four people were treated for smoke inhalation in San Sebastian and five were arrested for public disorder. In Bilbao, a small explosive device went off overnight Saturday in the doorway of an apartment building where a socialist city councillor's parents live, but no one was hurt.

Assailants also threw Molotov cocktails through the front window of a Citroen dealership, damaging several cars.

In Pamplona, attackers set fire to a telephone booth, several trash bins and an automatic teller machine at a bank.

In the town of Bermeo, 10 hooded assailants armed with baseball bats stormed the local headquarters of the Socialist Party and smashed it up Saturday. Four people were inside at the time but no one was

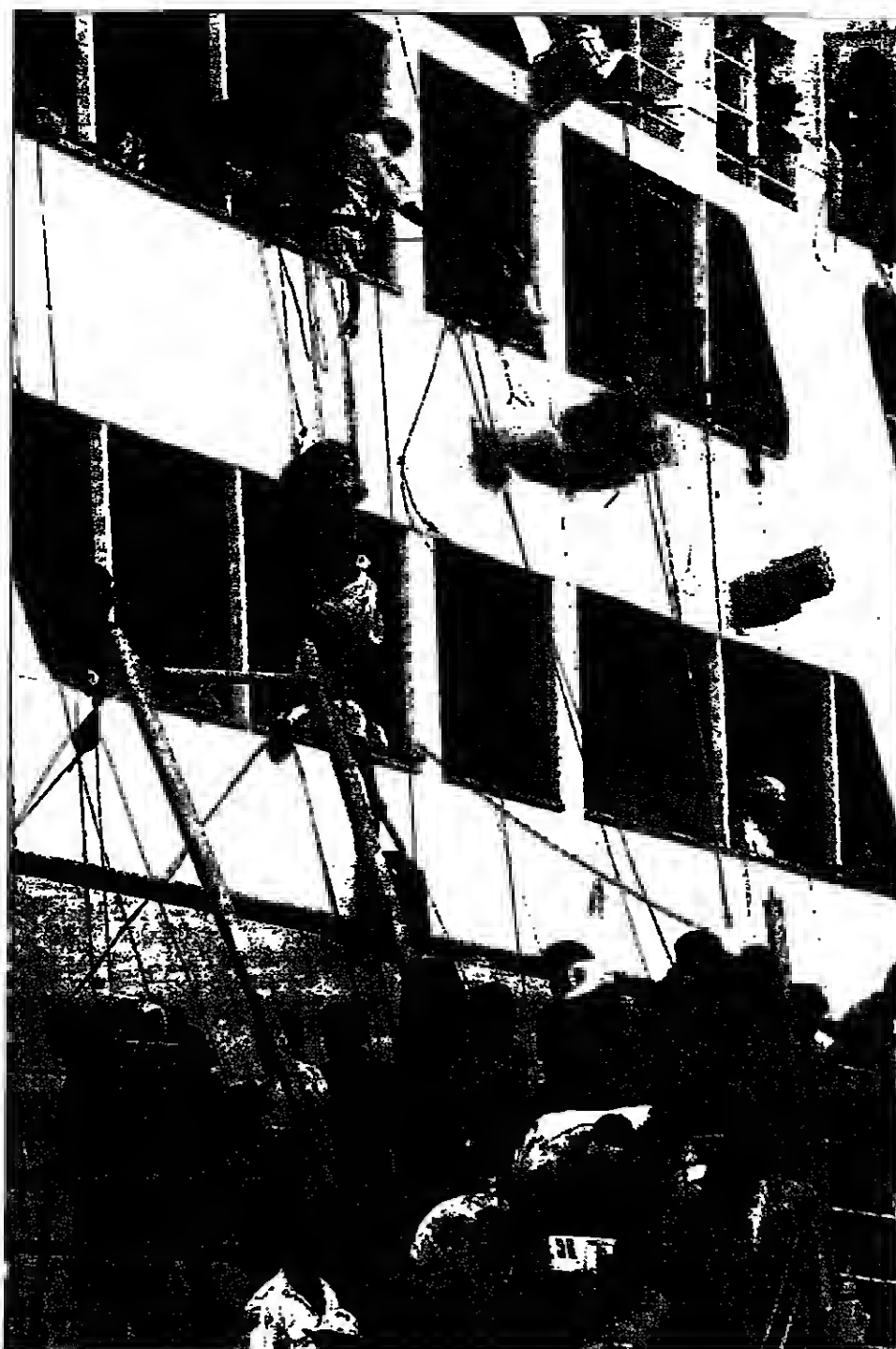
injured. The violence in these and other Basque towns followed Tuesday's arrest in Paris of an ETA member that Spanish police described as the leader of the group's commandos. Four other suspected ETA members were also arrested in Paris.

The next day, police who had been monitoring two senior ETA operatives in San Sebastian arrested them when it appeared the two were preparing to flee Spain. Seven other ETA suspects were also taken into custody.

Spanish government officials have insisted these arrests do not jeopardise the cease-fire ETA declared in September. So-called low-level street violence by young supporters of ETA began several months ago as the peace process appeared to stall, with the government rejecting Basque demands for concessions ahead of negotiations on ending the 30-year conflict.

Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar has offered to hold talks with ETA, which stands for Basque Homeland and Freedom, but ruled out allowing Basque secession.

ETA's armed campaign for independence has claimed nearly 800 lives.



Indonesian refugees and migrants hoist their belongings into a ship departing Ambon. Thousands of local people have been fleeing from Ambon because of continuing fighting between Christians and Muslims (Reuters photo)

Tension returns to Indonesia's spice island

AMBON, Indonesia (AFP) — Tension returned Sunday to the eastern Indonesian city of Ambon, scarred by weeks of sectarian violence, as the discovery of new corpses sparked fears of further unrest.

Ambon's streets, which had hesitantly begun to return to life Saturday morning with shops and markets reopening and traffic resuming, were again deserted by noon Sunday.

"It is most likely that people are taking no risk, fearing renewed violence since the discovery of the body in Galunggung yesterday," a local journalist said.

A Roman Catholic priest said parishioners had told him two bodies had been found in a ditch in the predominantly Muslim area of Galunggung Saturday.

Police said only one body had been found.

Heavy security has since been imposed in the city where Christian-Muslim violence since mid-January has left more than 200 dead and sparked an exodus of tens of thousands.

Earlier the city's Christian community quietly celebrated Sunday Mass in churches, many of them guarded by marines deployed since the military authorities took over from the police Thursday to try to restore order.

"We have had one platoon of marines guarding our church for the past two days and this has reassured our

people," said a man named Yoseph at the Silo Protestant Church.

Another platoon had also been deployed by the military at the main Al-Fatah Muslim mosque, he added.

At the Ambon cathedral, seven marines were on guard as hundreds of Christians attended morning mass there.

Some soldiers also took part in services including one at the devastated Negeri Lima church, where 100 people solemnly met in the shell of the building which only has walls left standing.

The congregations did not linger after mass with most people immediately hurrying home, witnesses said.

The market place, busy with traders Saturday morning, was deserted Sunday and the only vehicles to be seen were either military or police cars, while the few private vehicles were mostly accompanied by soldiers.

At the military headquarters, soldiers were preparing a symbolic ceremony to burn a variety of weapons confiscated or surrendered by their owners after the authorities called for a civilian disarmament.

The head of the Maluku provincial military command, Colonel Karel Rahalu, was quoted by the Antara news agency as saying security forces were conducting raids and street checks to disarm civilians.

Several military road blocks were set up across

the city and on its outskirts, where soldiers frisked passers-by and car passengers, checking their vehicles for weapons.

A total of 37 people in Ambon were found Saturday carrying various weapons including cutlasses, knives, spears, arrows and petrol bombs.

Rahalu was speaking on the neighbouring island of Saparua Saturday as he accompanied a team of 19 native Moluccan officers on a tour to try to bring peace among the Christian and Muslim communities in Maluku province, famed for its chain of spice-growing islands.

"People should realise and halt their conflict because if there are those resisting (the military) they will be immobilised, and if necessary shot on sight in line with the procedures," he warned.

The military took command of riot control after the latest wave of violence hit central Ambon late Wednesday.

The head of the Maluku military police, Major Suhendi, told Antara meanwhile his unit was investigating nine soldiers suspected of having violated procedures by shooting dead six people during Wednesday's riots.

Suhendi quoted witnesses as saying the soldiers had opened fire without warning.

Exiled aide of Malaysia's Anwar returns

KUALA LUMPUR (R) — The political secretary to sacked Malaysian Finance Minister Anwar Ibrahim returned home Sunday after a six-month self-imposed exile. Mohamed Ezam Mohd Noor, 31, who said Saturday he feared arrest upon his return to Malaysia, was instead greeted with shouts of "reformasi" (reform), the rallying cry of Anwar's supporters, at the airport.

Some 300 supporters and family members welcomed him at the airport on his arrival from Singapore, where he was in transit.

"From the information I gather, they may arrest me," Mohamed Ezam had told Reuters in Singapore ahead of his return.

He was driven to Anwar's house for a meeting with Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, the wife of the former cabinet minister. Anwar, remanded in prison, is currently on trial on corruption charges.

Mohamed Ezam left Malaysia for Indonesia's capital Jakarta on Sept. 29 when Anwar appeared in court with a black eye and other injuries that he sustained in police custody.

Just after the court appearance, Mohamed Ezam wrote an open letter, released on the Internet, denouncing police for the attacks on Anwar.

Mohamed Ezam's sources told him that the letter had automatically made him a target for police arrest, he said.

Anwar's sacking, arrest and subsequent injuries have stirred international and domestic indignation, which in September resulted in unprecedented anti-government protests.

On Feb. 28, former police chief Abdul Rahim Noor admitted to assaulting Anwar before a royal commission that was investigating Anwar's injuries.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has called Anwar morally unfit. But the former deputy prime minister says he is a victim of a high-level political conspiracy.

Anwar has been charged with five counts each of corruption and sodomy. He denies all charges against him.

Mohamed Ezam said after the meeting with Wan Azizah that he was touched by the support shown by leaders and people in the region towards the reform movement.

"All of them have expressed support for Malaysians in their struggle for justice," he said in a statement.

His lawyer, Sivarasa Rasiah, said there were still prospects of Mohamed Ezam being arrested.

"But he is prepared to face it," he told reporters.

Germany to set new priorities with Lafontaine gone

BONN (R) — German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's top policy advisor said Sunday the government would change direction following the unexpected departure of left-leaning Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine.

Chancellor Minister Bodo Hombach said that Schröder, a moderate in his leftist party with close ties to industry, would redouble efforts to cut taxes and try to remove barriers that have hindered companies investing in Germany for years.

"Things will obviously be different now," Hombach told ZDF Television. "We have to move in a different direction. Gerhard Schröder will have different priorities, that's obvious."

But the powerful left-wing of the ruling Social Democrats warned Schröder against tampering with the core elements of the government's programmes. Detlev von Larcher, a leader of the SPD's left-wing, said Schröder would be looking for trouble if he tried to redirect the party.

"That would lead to a major conflict within the SPD and would undermine the government's abilities over the long run," Von Larcher told the Welt Am Sonntag newspaper.

Schröder's government was shaken Thursday when Lafontaine abruptly quit as finance minister and SPD chairman.

He tried to limit the fall-out

by quickly nominating Hans Eichel, who lost reelection as state premier in Hesse last month, to replace Lafontaine as finance minister. Schröder took over the SPD leadership himself.

A German industry leader said Sunday he hoped that the chancellor would use Lafontaine's exit as an opportunity to overhaul the government's economic policies and cut the country's 10 per cent unemployment rate.

"I see the chance for a change in direction that will show the government is interested in policies that will be of benefit to the entire economy," Dieter Hundt, president of the BDA German employers association, told German radio.

"Industry will honour that," he said. "The previous policies had Lafontaine's signature all over them. We now have the chance for more modern economic policies, which will then have a positive impact on the labour market."

The outspoken Lafontaine, who had been ridiculed in the media for his leftist tax-and-spend theories and ostracised in financial circles for his lonely cries for market regulation, has sought seclusion behind the gates of his Saarbrücken home near the French border.

In his only comments since quitting, Lafontaine Saturday briefly appeared before journalists who had been camping out on the street outside his house and said that he was

a private citizen now and wanted to be left alone.

Lafontaine submitted his resignation in writing and has refused to discuss any aspect of his bizarre departure. He has even hung up the phone on Schröder, whom he had

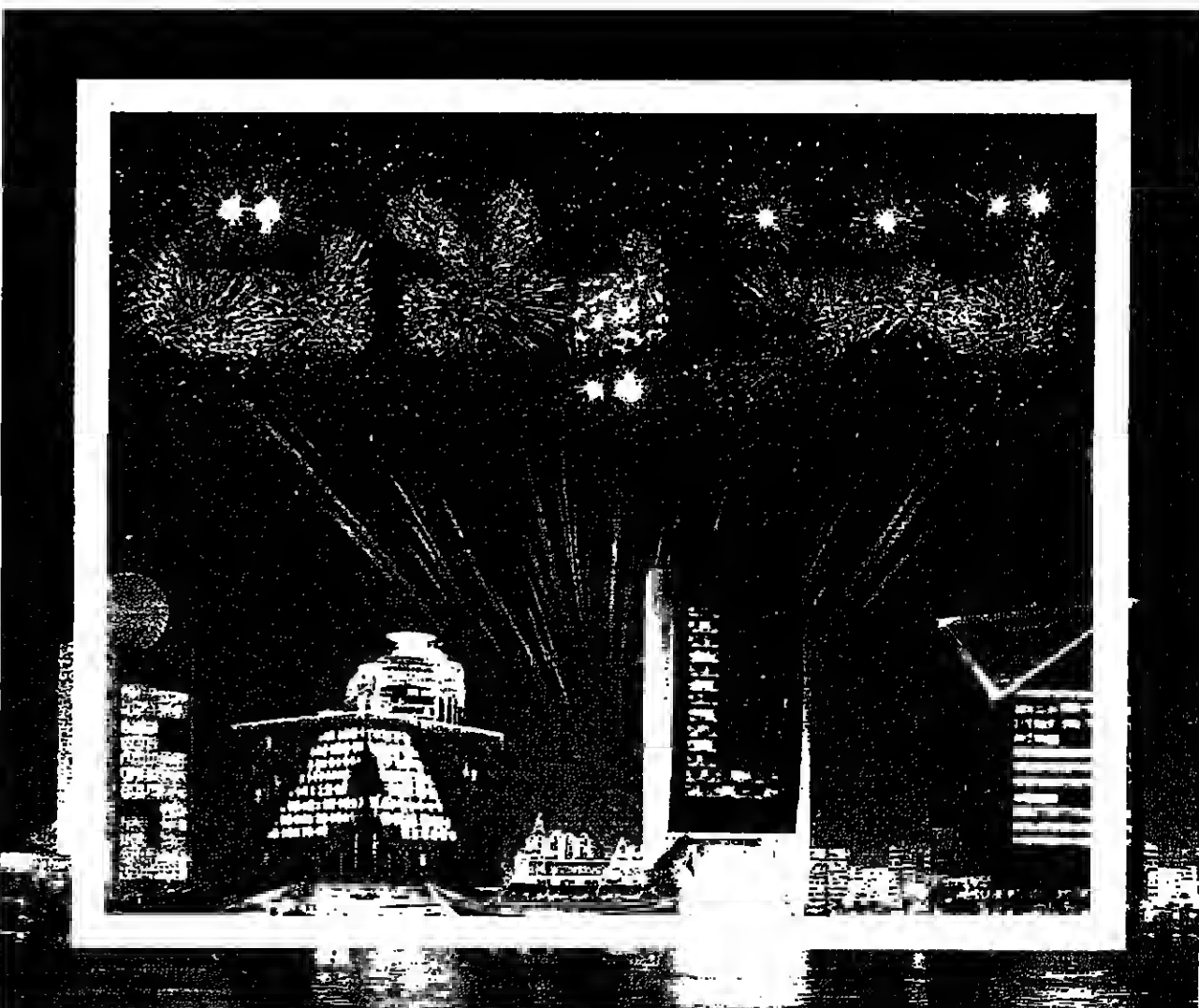
long called a close friend and ally.

Schröder, whose victory over Helmut Kohl in last September's election would not have been possible without Lafontaine's support, has declined any public comment

on Lafontaine's motives.

But the chancellor admitted in a remarkable box telephone interview he unwittingly gave to a Berlin radio reporter posing as German President Roman Herzog that Lafontaine refused to speak to him.

"I received his letter of resignation... and have not been able to talk with him because he does not want to talk with me," Schröder told the reporter, who was imitating Herzog's voice.



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Resurgence of listeria worries U.S. authorities

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Contamination of hot dogs and cold cuts by a sometimes deadly bacterium has led to an "extraordinary series of recalls" and U.S. government action to detect and prevent it, the New York Times reported Sunday.

Listeria monocytogenes resurfaced in December, when 35 million pounds of hot dogs and processed luncheon meats were recalled following an outbreak of listeriosis.

Nearly 100 people in 22 states became ill, and 20 deaths were reported, the Times said on Feb. 17. The U.S. government ordered the recall of close to a

tonne of meat products distributed to Asian specialty stores that may have been contaminated with listeria.

So far this year the department of agriculture has announced eight listeria recalls; seven of processed meats and one of milk.

By comparison, the December recall was one of only three in 1998. Two were announced in 1997.

While no deaths have been linked to the 1999 recalls, the December outbreak "shook everyone up," said Dr. Kay Wachsmuth of the Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

"We can't tell at this point if there is a resurgence," Wachsmuth told the paper.

Part of the problem is the longer shelf-life of modern, ready-to-eat food products, the Times said. Unlike many other disease-causing bacteria, listeria can thrive at refrigerator and freezer temperatures.

Listeria poses little danger to most people. But it is a serious threat to the very young and very old, to pregnant women, and to people with compromised immune systems.

The bacterium can be treated with antibiotics, but even with drug treatment the mortality rate is about 30 per cent, the paper said.

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Change from within

HIS MAJESTY King Abdullah was very clear in his message Saturday to U.S. envoy Martin Indyk when he told the ranking U.S. official that the embargo on Iraq has become an intolerable burden on that country's people, that the U.N. imposed sanctions on Baghdad should be lifted and that "Jordan will never take any part in instigating any changes in Iraq." This strong Jordanian message is certainly timely amidst persistent reports that Washington is planning a large-scale decisive action in Iraq in its effort to remove that country's leadership and is busy soliciting Arab support for its plan.

Several Arab capitals have already voiced concerns about U.S. intentions. Doha's Emir Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifa Al Thani called on the Washington to stop its daily aerial strikes against Iraqi targets. Egypt reiterated the same position Saturday when Foreign Minister Amr Musa called on the U.S. to stop the attacks. The United Arab Emirates had voiced a similar concern many months ago. The silent majority in the Arab World feel even stronger about the unilateral actions by the U.S. and Britain against the Arab country.

Whatever Washington and London have up their sleeves against Baghdad, any changes on the ruling regime in the country must come from within and not from outside the country, the Arab leaders told American envoys. As King Abdullah told Indyk, change in Iraq "is the concern of the Iraqi people alone." Translated to real terms, the Iraqi people must be provided with the real opportunity to exercise the right to self-determination by enjoying free and democratic elections. The call by the international community on Iraq to exercise pluralistic democracy is a legitimate cause as is the call on Iraq to meet its international treaty obligations.

Starving the Iraqi people, like the North Koreans or the Cubans have been starved for decades, is certainly not going to provide the right climate for change.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi people, sick and hungry, cannot possibly effect the change that they yearn for and that their neighbours would like them to carry out.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Kheirallah said all indications are that the declaration of an independent Palestinian state will be postponed, to remove any possible pretext that could be useful for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the run-up to the elections in May. Kheirallah quoted an American official in London as saying that a declaration before the Israeli elections will favour Netanyahu. The most important issue is to consider what will happen after elections, and certainly Palestinian President Yasser Arafat will not declare a state before May 17, said Kheirallah. However, Arafat has the right to refuse such a postponement unless there is some compensation, for example a U.S. pledge to push final status negotiations — a factor that will practically enable the Palestinians to declare their state within a reasonable period, he added. At a time when the U.S. is hesitating, Europe has already taken a "brave" step by considering Jerusalem a "special body," noted the writer. It is obvious that Palestinian flexibility is paying off, and ensures a declaration of an independent Palestinian state regardless of the date, Kheirallah concluded.

Al Dustour's Oriei Rintawi listed a number of U.S. and Israeli statements and decisions, which he described as "impudent and provocative." The U.S. Congress' decision to warn Palestinian President Yasser Arafat about declaring an independent state on May 4 is "extraordinarily" so, and the voting on this decision is even worse (98 for and one against), Rintawi said. Extremists at the Israeli Knesset have suggested a similar idea, but did not reach the stage of voting, said Rintawi, but assuming that they manage to include this issue in their agenda, it will not get such support. The Israeli government, furthermore, has the "nerve" to request \$1.2 billion from U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen as a price for an agreement. Israel did not implement (the Wye Accords), said Rintawi. U.S. statements about Iraq are "extremely impudent," after they called the air attacks nothing but "self-defence," the U.S. administration also claimed that the "silent" war against Iraq is American "business" and has nothing to do with anyone else, including the U.N. Security Council, said the writer. According to these U.S. announcements, Rintawi said, Iraq is the "aggressor" and responsible for the continuing clashes. The writer concluded by saying that the most "impudent" incident last week is the "courageous" defence by an Arab-Israeli of the Israeli fundamental movement of Chas, claiming it represents the Arab community and expresses its concerns, even though it bans Arabs from joining.

The year we become six billion

By Gwynne Dyer

IT IS the year of the six billion: on June 16, the world's human population will reach the astonishing total of 6,000,000,000, precisely double the figure in 1960. Japan is marking the event after a fashion, by finally legalising oral contraceptives. But China, with over a fifth of the world's people, has authorised a pilot programme that could result in ending the country's draconian 'one-child-per-family' birth-control policy.

Disasters in the making? Not necessarily. Phasing out China's one-child policy now, for example, could avert a boom in the birth-rate if and when the country democratises. And legalising oral contraceptives is unlikely to affect the birth rate in Japan, which is already one of the lowest in the world.

The impending end of Japan's 35-year ban on the Pill was triggered by female outrage at the government's rapid approval of Viagra. "The elderly men who rule Japan raced to approve a drug to enhance male sexuality," fumed Yuriko Ashino, deputy director of the Family Planning Federation of Japan, "but women have had to wait for decades for a drug that would improve the quality of their life." The Health Ministry is expected to recommend in June that oral contraceptives at last

become generally available on prescription.

But why weren't they legalised over 30 years ago, when they became commercially available in the rest of the developed world? The initial reasons were the chauvinism of Japanese males (who feared that the Pill would make women promiscuous), and a nationalist determination to let nothing hinder the rapid growth of Japan's population. The reason the ban has lasted so long, however, is the influence of the medical lobby representing the doctors who perform Japan's 350,000 annual abortions.

Abortion has become Japanese women's main way of dealing with unwanted pregnancies in a society without easy contraception, and they are hugely profitable for the doctors who do them. Their lobby made large, regular contribution to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, and the normal dynamics of Japanese politics did the rest.

But here's the point. Banning the pill did nothing to keep Japan's birth-rate up: women just had abortions instead. Indeed, Japan's birth rate has fallen so low that the over-65s outnumber the under-15s. The total population, now 125 million, will go into absolute decline only eight years from now.

So what drove Japanese women to stop having babies? A recent report written for the Ministry of

Health by Michiko Mukuno pulls no punches: it's the fact that "the Japanese corporate climate requires husbands to put work before family." In a society where "salarymen" have to show their loyalty to the company by working very long hours and then spending many evenings and holidays with colleagues or clients, there is just no time left for a normal family life.

Japanese women have responded by having fewer children, or by avoiding marriage entirely: the average age at marriage of Japanese females has been rising by four months annually throughout this decade. This had nothing to do with the contraceptive technologies available, or even with the general levels of health and economic security in the society. It was just that Japanese women have got fed up with having to raise their families effectively alone.

Modern population-control experts are finally coming to understand what should have been obvious all along: that people's motives, not technology or regulations, are key in deciding how many children they have. People have always known how to limit their numbers — even hunter-gatherers did it, though their method was often just exposing unwanted children — and they generally will choose to do so if

they can count on a reasonable level of prosperity and a good level of child health care. So since China has more or less achieved those levels, why does it continue with the ruthless 'one-child-per-family' policy?

When the policy was first imposed in 1979, the sheer pressure of people on China's limited land and resources was generally seen as excuse enough: births had to be forced far below normal levels to avert future calamity. China is still heading for 1.6 billion people in the next half-century, but without the 'one-child' policy, some experts say, it would have been 300 million more. Other experts, however, wonder whether similar results might not have been achieved with much less coercion.

These were the years, after all, when decent health care and a measure of economic security were becoming normal in China: people's motivations about children would have been changing anyway. Besides, resistance to the coercive 'one-child' policy has forced major retreats on the government. While it is fairly strictly enforced in the cities, in the countryside these days most families are allowed two children (especially if the first was a girl), so long as there is a five-year gap between them.

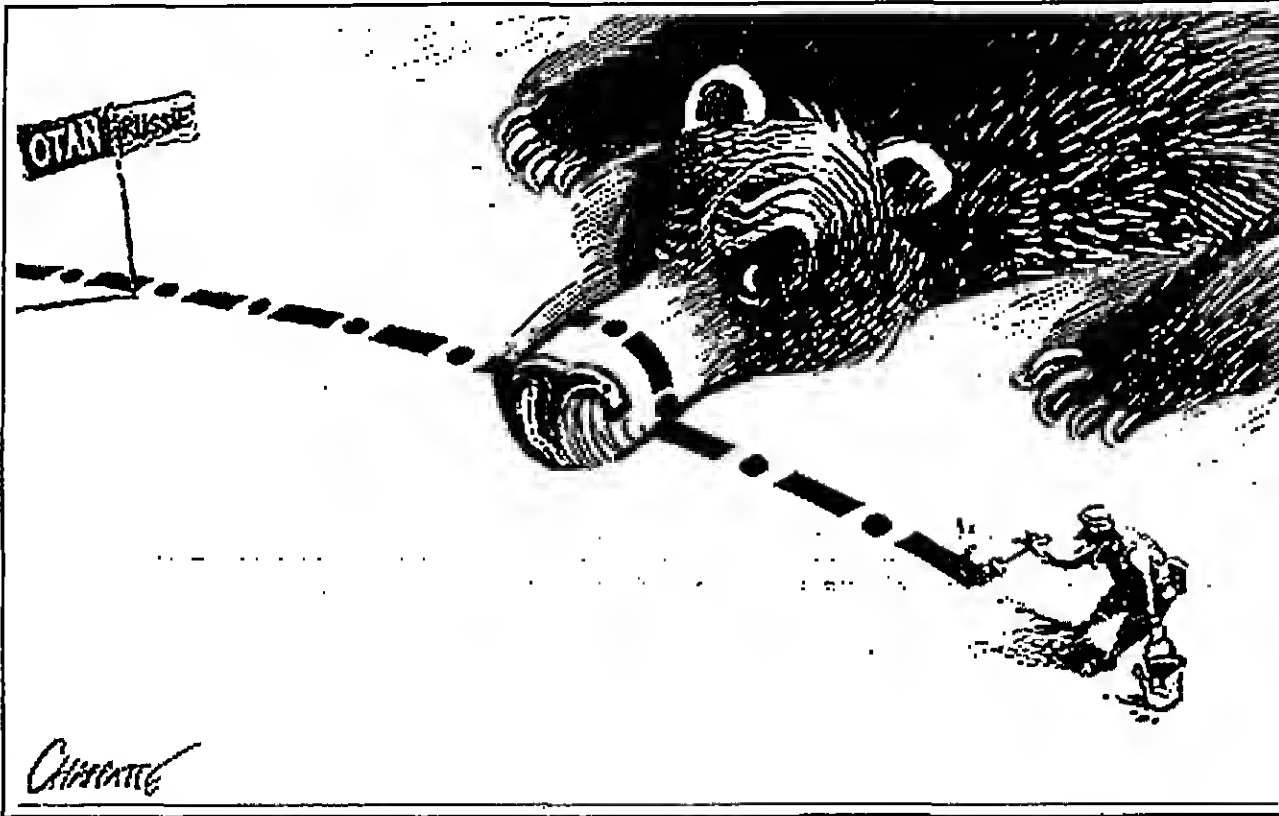
So it's really a one-point-eight-child-per-family policy, not drasti-

cally different from what has been achieved elsewhere in Asia, and it will be blown away by popular resentment the moment that China moves to a less repressive system. Might it not be a good idea for China to move now to the kind of non-coercive approach that has been so successful in, for example, Indonesia, where the average number of children has dropped from 5.6 to 2.9 per woman in the past 25 years?

Starting next month, in 32 rural counties with a total population of 20 million, China will launch a pilot project that ends coercion and relies on making information and a wide variety of contraceptive means available to everybody. China-wide change may follow if loosening the controls does not lead to an instant population explosion in the test counties.

Six billion people on Spaceship Earth may already be too many, and the cruel irony about population control is that the most effective means of achieving it improves people's living standards also increases each individual's pressure on the environment. But the battle against overwhelming numbers is being won, and the good news is that the most efficient methods do not require repression.

The writer is a London-based independent journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries



A free, sceptical, impertinent media should form the spine of Europe

By Rob T. Herich

IMAGINE THAT while Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister her son had taken his own life. Do you suppose it would have been possible to impose a news blackout on the story in Britain? Might the press, radio and television have opted, as a matter of taste, for a self-imposed ban? Before you dismiss the very idea as absurd, prepare to hear just such a story: a comparable case, in a mature European democracy with an uncensored press, not far from our shores. Their Prime Minister's son committed suicide. The Prime Minister took two months' leave from leadership of her party to grieve the tragedy; but remained Prime Minister. Everybody in the media knew about it. Nobody published. Nobody explained. The tragedy was simply not reported.

We are not talking about some fledgling Eastern European state, new to the ways of open press debate. The country is Norway. I was there a few weeks ago for a journalists' conference, and I was invited to talk about press attitudes to privacy in public life. My Norwegian counterparts were astonished at the impotence of Anglo-Saxon newspapers and offered this story about their former Prime Minister as an example of the gulf between attitudes.

The politician concerned was Gro Harlem Brundtland. Her son died in the autumn of 1992. After her two-month break she returned to her party's leadership and remained Prime Minister until 1996. But not until last year, when Mrs Brundtland herself wrote about the affair in an autobiography did the Norwegian media consider it acceptable to tell the public what had happened.

I wonder whether your reaction to this is like mine: tom. On the one hand there is a certain magnificence in the way an entire institution like the diverse and loosely-knit Norwegian media held the line. The temptation to publish this sensation must have been strong. One feels, too, some satisfaction that a private individual's feelings, at a time of huge personal difficulty, should have been so respected: a national courtesy perhaps absent here in Britain. It may be that the Norwegian people would approve of the way they were kept in the dark.

But it won't do, will it? How long has it been in Britain since it would have been possible to suppress such a story about a senior politician? A century? Two? The furies and tragedies of our monarchs' personal lives have seldom been out of bounds — the most famous exception, the abdication crisis, being widely considered an inglorious hour for the British press.

American journalism is much the same. Disproportionate or not, who here seriously thinks the allegations made against Bill Clinton should not have been reported? Contrast this with a poll published in France last year by *Elle* magazine. Eighty

three per cent of French readers felt the public had no right to know about the private life of their President. Yet now they rush to hear news of Monica Lewinsky. It is simply not true that ordinary people on the Continent are not interested in the secrets of the powerful — that they have (as snooty British commentators insinuate) "risen above" that kind of curiosity, being more grown-up than the British masses. In Spain, such stories, published in an irredeemably trashy magazine called *Lacunas*, are devoured hungrily by ordinary Spaniards.

There is one reason alone why this sort of news never achieves a wider currency in France or Spain: mainstream editors won't print it. Broadcasters won't broadcast it. There exists on the Continent, to use a fashionable term, an institutional deference among respectable journalists towards the political class.

Assumed by politicians, it is accepted as the norm by journalists. And it is infectious. Even Britain's Sue MacGregor succumbed. She was interviewing Jacques Santer about alleged corruption among European commissioners. Or, rather, she thought she was. Santer was simply not playing. Asked about specific instances, he ignored her. He wouldn't even acknowledge a theoretical application of general rules (which he was happy to discuss) to particular individuals. He wouldn't talk about it at all.

Evasion is not a continental prerogative, but a British or American politician would have felt obliged to wriggle: would have explicitly refused to comment, insisted that the question was inappropriate. Not Santer. His spoken English was fine but he just took no notice of Ms. MacGregor. She tried a second time but, when Santer again failed to engage, she simply gave up. She would have mocked, badgered or scolded a British politician because both would tacitly accept the ground-rules and know this was deserved. But pitched into a different milieu, an Anglo-Saxon journalist quickly feels abashed. "Eh - alors?" ("So what?") remarked President Mitterrand to a French journalist who, remarkably, had the temerity to ask him about an illegitimate daughter who, with his mistress, was being kept at the taxpayers' expense. The discussion ended. It was the journalist, not the President, who had misbehaved.

I am making a jump here which requires explanation: moving from essentially personal matters, like suicide or adultery, to questions which may involve private secrets but touch the public interest. And there is an important distinction to be judged. The question in a democracy, however, is who should be allowed to do the judging? The politician? The journalist? Or the public? My hunch is that on the Continent (of course it varies between countries) it is the politician.

In Britain and the United States it is, in theory, the

journalist (or his editor); but, in practice, the public often gets to make up its own mind: for the presumption is that, if a story is arguably in the public interest, print and be damned.

"Unfortunately there's no Anglo-Saxon follow-up tradition here," remarked the Editor of France's lonely satirical magazine, *Le Canard Enchaîné*. "There's a small lobby of TV journalists who are very polite and courteous to politicians. They're part of the same elite world." He was commenting on an attempt by an interviewer to raise a controversy about a property deal involving the President.

"That's quite wrong, dear Anne Sinclair," replied Jacques Chirac — and she moved to another issue. Earlier his Prime Minister had banned all staff from buying copies of *Le Canard Enchaîné*. "No French journalist has yet written a revealing book on Chirac," one Paris literary publisher told *The Sunday Times*, "out of fear that he or she would never eat lunch at the Elysée again." Long after the Greenpeace affair (a sink of inquiry, which never really sunk as a story in the French press) a survey showed that three quarters of the French public consider investigative journalism "unethical".

Forgive me, but isn't this just a different world from ours? There is no space here to descend into Italian current affairs, where collusion between politicians and the media defies description; no time to explore the sense of responsibility many continental journalists seem to feel, not to destabilise the State in democracies that may not really work properly, and which are still nervous after World War II.

Nor have I done justice to the Scandinavian scene, where inquiry into financial irregularity is as rigorous as its respect for different kinds of "personal" secret. Germany is different again: its press is now as salacious as ours about the spiciest side of life, but a high-minded public-spiritedness creeps into media treatment of "important" policy stories, like currency union. No German politician would submit to a Paxman.

This matters profoundly. Europe is moving towards serious democratic deficit in pan-European government, a gap unlikely to be filled by any Europe-wide elected assembly, and into which our parochial national legislatures are reluctant or unable to pry. Into that gap, only the news media seem equipped to go with any real persistence and method. A free, sceptical, impertinent and vigorous press, from the Atlantic to the Urals, could form the spine of a sort of emerging European democracy: transnational in its spirit of inquiry.

But don't ask the Norwegians why their Prime Minister dropped out for two months. Don't ask President Chirac about his son-in-law's mysterious suicide. And don't ask Jacques Santer anything.

Letters to the editor

Proper water policy may avert shortages

WHILE THE prospects for more rainfall at this time of the year are very slim, the scenario of a hot and waterless summer is very real and only a few months away. Amman's citizens quite vividly recall last summer's water nightmare, that resulted in an emergency situation, catching a helpless and unprepared government off guard, and unable to handle the situation with efficiency, while desperate citizens, most of whom developed a water scarcity phobia and had no choice but to drink polluted water, thanked God that there was any at all. Bearing in mind all these unpleasant memories, certainly none of us is eager to go through the same painful experience. Allow me to point out that securing fresh, potable water to its citizens is the sole obligation of the government and not an individual's responsibility. We as citizens, on the other hand, are sharing this responsibility towards the community by having learnt how to cope with water shortages by minimising water usage during summer. However, miracles cannot be expected when it comes to technical issues and when there is no running water in the taps for weeks in a row.

Furthermore, there is no need to constantly condole Jordanian tax-payers that similar water crisis take place all around the world, even in the most advanced Western countries. Such comparisons cannot but be viewed as totally baseless, first of all because those countries are rich in water resources to start with. Secondly, if a water situation should arise due to heavy rainfalls or floods, those countries are fully prepared both financially and technically to deal with disasters in contrast to Jordan, a country with limited resources.

The current government has solemnly pledged that water issues will be topping its agenda of priorities. Hopefully, the concerned authorities have also learnt from past mistakes and will not allow their recurrence. With the few months left before the summer sets in fully, this government still has time to adopt strong and effective measures to effect regular and equal water supply to all residents in the various parts of the Kingdom, and to secure a smooth flow of local and imported fresh bottled water at acceptable prices, to put under control any attempts at illegal water profiteering. They must also speedily implement important water projects that have been given financial aid by foreign countries. If all this is done with a great sense of obligation towards the well-being of Jordanians and their needs, there will be enough water for everybody.

Rumiana M. Nuseibeh
Amman

SPANA will not abandon J.S.P.A.

MAY I correct a couple of errors in your article about the Jordanian Society for the Protection of Animals ("Animal Protection Society faces financial straits", JT, March 9)? Firstly, neither SPANA nor the J.S.P.A. works with the tourist horses in Petra; and secondly, and most importantly, SPANA has no plans to abandon the J.S.P.A. and its vital role of working with the animals of poor people. That task is enormous, and although it can never be enough, SPANA in 1999 will be spending more money in Jordan than ever before!

Jeremy Hulme
Chief Executive
SPANNA

Letter of condolence

HIS MAJESTY King Hussein was a rare jewel on this earth. Most of us live ordinary lives, enveloped by personal problems and the pressures of daily living, never realising how minute our problems are in comparison to those a king carries upon his shoulders.

King Hussein carried the weight of the world upon his shoulders, and did so with greatness, grace and elegance. He was a man of God, and did the works of God, bringing peace to person after person; heart after heart; nation after nation.

May God bless him — the peace-maker — and his son, His Majesty King Abdullah, who I believe will be the new jewel of the Middle East. Jordan, you should be very proud.

Deborah Arslan
U.S.

Finnish team identifies Byzantine monastic complex on Jabal Haroon at Petra — Part I

(NOTE: This is the first of two articles on the first excavation season of the Finnish Jabal Haroon Project, working on Aaron's Mountain at Petra. Part II appears next Monday.)

FOR THE past century, scholars have assumed that the earth-covered ancient structures near the summit of Jabal Haroon (Mount Aaron) in south Jordan were the remains of a Byzantine monastery and pilgrimage centre. Now, a Finnish team has completed its first full season of archaeological exploration in the area, and has confirmed the existence of a monastic complex with a large church and a smaller chapel which might have been dedicated to St. Aaron.

The Finnish Jabal Haroon Project (FJHP) is directed by Jaakko Frösén of the University of Helsinki (Finland). He is joined in overall project management and analysis by Zbigniew T. Fiema of Dumbarton Oaks Centre for Byzantine Studies (U.S.), who has worked at Petra for much of the past decade.

Jabal Haroon mountain is located about five kilometres west of central Petra, and is so named because it is believed to be the same place as Mount Hor, where Aaron, Moses' older brother, died and was buried.

Aaron, the older brother of Moses and younger brother of Miriam, was the first high priest in the Bible. He was denied entry to Canaan, like Moses, and died and was buried on a mountaintop in Transjordan (Exodus 4:14-7:1; Micah 6:4).

Aaron is known in Arabic as Nebi Haroon (the Prophet Aaron). The Quran describes him as an inspired and righteous man, a prophet who was "granted authority by God" and "guided along the straight path" (Quran 4:163; 6:85; 19:53; 23:45; 28:34; 37:118). Aaron is also frequently mentioned with Moses in the Quran ("We gave Moses and Aaron the salvation and a radiance," 21:48).

The Bible says that God gave Aaron instructions and spoke to him and Moses (Numbers 18 and 19). Aaron was the "prophet" of Moses, in that he spoke for Moses, because Moses was shy and bumble, and not an eloquent speaker. He is referred to in Psalms as the one "whom God had chosen" and "the holy one of the Lord" (Psalm 105:26; 106:16).

When it came time for Aaron to die, he and his son Eleazer climbed the

mountain with Moses "in the sight of the whole community." Moses ceremoniously took off Aaron's priestly garments and placed them on Eleazer. "And Aaron died there on top of the mountain," Moses and Eleazer came down from the mountain, "and when the whole community learned that Aaron had died, the entire house of Israel mourned him for thirty days." (Numbers 20:27-29).

Aaron is also known for the Priestly Blessing, also called the Aaronic blessing (Numbers 6:24-26): "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace."

In view of Aaron's rich moral legacy and his religious role, Mt. Aaron is considered holy by all three monotheistic Abrahamic faiths: Muslim, Christian and Jewish traditions alike believe that Aaron was buried on the summit of the mountain. Local tradition says that an eagle picked up Aaron's body and deposited it there at its final resting place. The spot was later commemorated with a church and subsequently by the Islamic "well" or shrine that stands there today.

Religious facilities were reported on the mountain from as early as the Nabataean-Roman period, including references to the burial place of Aaron by the Roman-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (end of the 1st century AD) and subsequent Byzantine and Arab sources. In the early 4th century AD also the church historian Eusebius wrote that Mount Hor was in the Petra region.

The large Byzantine church excavated in recent years by American archaeologists in central ancient Petra produced a cache of carbonised 6th century Byzantine papyrus scrolls. One scroll, dated to June 15, AD 513,



Part of the excavated apse area of the Byzantine church on Mt. Aaron (photo by J. Frosen)



The white Islamic shrine at the top of Mt. Aaron (at left) and the area of the Byzantine monastery and pilgrimage centre (arrow) before excavations started last year (photo by Jane Taylor)

was the last will of a man called Obodanios, son of Obodanios; it mentioned the "House of Our Lord the Saint High-Priest Aaron" in the vicinity. Scholars took this as confirmation that Aaron was venerated in the Petra area during the Byzantine period, and the obvious place for such veneration would have been the mountain long associated with him. The date of the abandonment of the mountaintop by the Christians who used the monastic complex cannot be determined accurately, but must have happened by the mid-14th century AD, when the present Islamic shrine was built on the summit.

Recent explorations considered the ruins located below the summit of the mountain, along with the tomb of Aaron, to be those of a Byzantine monastic complex and pilgrimage centre, and the 1998 excavation showed that the complex contained a church, a chapel and probably a hostel, that were used from perhaps the 5th to the 8th centuries AD.

The Finnish project completed an initial reconnaissance survey of the entire mountain area in 1997, setting the stage for the October 1998 excavation. The work aims primarily to investigate the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods in Petra, both of which are not well documented due to the traditional scholarly emphasis in this region on Nabataean or earlier remains.

The overall research goals of the project include: studying the variations in human occupation of the mountain over the ages, especially the area of the presumed monastic complex near the summit; investigating the patterns of how humans adapted to the resources of the area, including agricultural and other forms of land exploitation in ancient and recent times; and, identifying Mt. Aaron's wider historical significance,



By Rami G. Khouri

including its relations to Petra and the immediate vicinity from Nabataean through Islamic times.

The 1998 fieldwork focused on the buried architectural complex located on the plateau some 70 metres below the summit of the mountain, with the Islamic shrine on the summit visible above. The entire monastic complex, measuring some 75 x 45 metres, was intensively surveyed and mapped last year.

Four excavation trenches showed that the site had been exploited and inhabited from the Nabataean through the Islamic periods, with the heaviest use and architectural presence during the Byzantine period. At least three major periods of occupation during the Byzantine era were identified. Fiema said in a recent interview. The excavated structures include a three-aisle basilical church, a smaller chapel, and (probably) the remains of a monastery and pilgrims' hostel.

The regional survey of the mountain and its adjacent wadis revealed the presence of a complex water harnessing and irrigation system first built by the Nabataeans in the 1st century AD, and comprising dams, cisterns, water channels and other structures.

Some 30 scholars and students from the University of Helsinki and the Helsinki University of Technology participated in the 1998 season, along with two scholars from other countries and two representatives of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities. Dr. Fawzi Zayadin and Hani Falahat. The excavations were funded by the Emil Aaltonen Foundation (Finland) with logistical assistance by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities. The 1998 excavations were funded by the Emil Aaltonen Foundation (Finland) with logistical assistance by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities.

Aspirin at 100, still a 'wonderdrug'

By Matt Karnitschnig
Reuters

IT'S BEEN said to cure or prevent everything from headaches to heart attacks. Some call it "the wonder-drug." Felix Hoffmann, its German inventor, called it acetylsalicylic acid. Most know it simply as Aspirin.

Saturday, March 6, the German company Bayer celebrated Hoffmann's discovery by marking the 100th anniversary of Aspirin's launch.

Simple to make and even easier to administer, Aspirin, like Coca Cola, and Levis, is one of only a handful of brands to have transcended cultures, borders and generations to enjoy almost universal recognition.

Mentioned in films and fiction, the drug has become as enduring an element of life in the 20th century as the car and television.

The Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega Y Gasset summed up the remedy's influence in the 1930s, saying modern man lived in "the age of the Aspirin."

One hundred years after its introduction, Bayer's annual Aspirin sales total about one billion marks (\$555.6 million), a tidy sum for a product whose potential was at first doubted by the firm's management.

Despite Hoffmann's championing of his discovery, his bosses at Bayer were more interested in his laboratory's work on another compound — diacetylmorphine, which they viewed as an alternative for patients given morphine to treat coughs.

Bayer called its new cough medicine heroin, only later discovering that its "heroic" powers were addictive.

Two years after Hoffmann developed Aspirin, it underwent clinical trials at a Berlin hospital, a first for any drug. The results convinced Bayer to go ahead with it.

Berlin's imperial patent office granted Bayer a trademark for Aspirin on March 6, 1899 but the company was denied patent protection because of its similarity to earlier discoveries.

The name Aspirin is derived from acetyl and spiraea ulmaria, the plant that produces salicylic acid, the drug's active ingredient.

Sold initially in powder form, Aspirin would later become the first drug to be sold as a tablet.

Legend behind the discovery legend has it that Hoffmann's discovery came as a result of his search for a treatment for his father's rheumatism.

Doctors prescribed Hoffmann senior salicylic acid, the application of which as a painkiller dates back to Hippocrates in 440 BC.

But the drug irritated the elder Hoffmann's stomach, a problem common among patients at the time.

The 29-year-old Hoffmann got round it through the process of acetylation, creating a compound of salicylic and acetic acids.

Though he was not the first to try this technique, he was the first to do it successfully. Hoffmann, who would later leave Germany to study art in Switzerland, didn't profit from the drug, but it made his company a fortune and secured its future.

"It's been an absolute cash cow for them," said Christian Faiz, a Frankfurt-based chemical analyst who began his career at Bayer.

Indeed, Aspirin became such a prized commodity

that the allies stripped the German firm of its rights to the drug during World War I and cemented their dispossession of it in the Treaty of Versailles.

In the United States Bayer was forced to sell its production facilities.

But in 1994, the German group paid \$1 billion to buy back the U.S.-based Bayer from the firm that it acquired in the war, finally regaining its trademark cross symbol and name in the world's premier pharmaceutical market.

Though Bayer recovered its rights to the aspirin trademark in most countries, it remains a generic term in the United States, France and Britain.

Over the years, the medical applications for Aspirin have multiplied.

From its inception it has been used against inflammation and to relieve pain and fever, but it was only more recently that scientists discovered its effectiveness in helping prevent cardiovascular diseases, colorectal cancer, and strokes.

In Britain, doctors have found that taking a soluble Aspirin within a few hours of suffering chest pain can prevent the onset of a heart attack and have urged everyone to carry the drug.

For those who take the warning to heart, a British company has crafted Aspirin cuff links which can be had for about 30 pounds (\$48.22).

Whether from a package, a bottle or cuff links, the human race consumes some 100 billion Aspirin tablets a year, making it by far the world's best selling and most trusted remedy.

David versus Goliath in case over use of marijuana as medicine

By Amy Roe
Agence France Presse

FLORIDA IS steeped in the debate over whether marijuana should be used legally as medicine, and the state's high court will hear a case next month that could legalise the practice.

Sheriffs deputies busted George Sowell, a 61-year-old glaucoma patient, in September 1995 for growing marijuana in the woods near his rural Washington County home.

His case is one of only three medical marijuana cases ever argued in Florida, and the first to be heard before the Florida Supreme Court.

Sowell's attorney, John Daniel of Panama City, said Sowell was growing marijuana so he would not have to purchase it from street dealers. Sowell had tried to get into a federal medical marijuana programme which had by then been discontinued, Daniel said.

But lawyers for the state attorney general say Sowell could have used perfectly legal prescription drugs that mimic the effects of marijuana.

Initially, a trial judge denied Sowell's medical necessity defence, but in 1997, the Tallahassee-based First District Court upheld an appeal.

The case will be heard on April 7. Meanwhile, Floridians for Medical Rights is circulating a petition to get a medical marijuana initiative on the November ballot.

Alaska, Arizona, California, Nevada and Washington State have passed similar initiatives, and one is on the November ballot in Oregon.

A few Florida residents now obtain government-grown marijuana as holdovers from the now-defunct Compassionate Use programme. Then president George Bush's administration closed the programme in 1992, but allowed 13 participants to continue their treatment.

Glaucoma patient Elvy Mufikka of Hollywood, Florida is one of them.

In 1988 she was arrested for growing marijuana she used to treat her glaucoma. She faced a 5,000-dollar fine and five years in jail.

The case received national media attention, and Mufikka gained public support from South Florida and around the country. Defended by a pro bono attorney, Mufikka won and later became the third person admitted to the Compassionate Use programme.

Mufikka credits her marijuana use with saving her vision.

Diagnosed with glaucoma in 1975 as a result of childhood cataracts, Mufikka spent 12 years in and out of hospitals for surgeries that she said were, at best, ineffective, with some procedures even exacerbating her vision loss.

"Finally, a compassionate doctor told me if I didn't start smoking marijuana, I would go blind," she said.

At first, Mufikka was sceptical. "I really questioned his sanity," she said. But after trying marijuana she found it not only worked best, but she did not develop a tolerance to it, as she did with her prescription drugs.

She said she tried the synthetic prescription versions of marijuana, such as Marinol, but they were a poor substitute.

"It only worked for one week," she said. Mufikka said. "For most (glaucoma) patients, the most it works for is six weeks."

Mufikka and her physician documented her marijuana use, and took the data to the Bascom-Palmer Eye Institute in Miami, but doctors there refused to acknowledge the study, she said. She now receives marijuana with a prescription, and prefers to add it to baked goods.

"Here it is 23 years later and it is still working for me," she said.

A medical marijuana activist, Mufikka said she's hoping Florida will join the more than 30 states which have made medical marijuana use legal.

She said the ill and dying should be allowed to use marijuana openly and without fear of prosecution.

"We are condemning the people to the permanent jail of blindness," Mufikka said, adding: "It's time we make our legislators accountable for the people who are dying as we speak."

Daniel, the attorney for George Sowell, said he would cite Mufikka's 1993 appellate court ruling.

"If we win, it will further affect different Florida rulings on medical marijuana," he said. "It's little old George Sowell against the state attorney general and the State of Florida. It really is David and Goliath."

Russian brain surgery removes appetite for drugs

By Marina Koreneva
Agence France Presse

IVAN SIROTKIN, 20 had tried time and time again to kick his drug habit, without success, before he went to the St. Petersburg Human Brain Research Institute and got cured.

In a three-hour operation, surgeons neutralised using a cryosurgical technique the part of his brain causing his addiction, with the result that he has completely lost his appetite for drugs.

For the past year, the St. Petersburg institute has performed similar neurosurgery on several patients and doctors say 70 per cent of them were cured of their physical and psychological dependency. They said the treatment was not only effective but had no discernible side-effects on the patient's

personality.

The surgeons drill a hole in the skull and then freeze about eight millimetres on the surface of the brain. Throughout the operation which is carried out under local anaesthetic, the patient is conscious.

"I would like to invite you home doctor to have a drink together," Ivan joked during the operation.

"Operations of this type have been done for years to cure the 'ghost limb' syndrome — where patients who have lost a limb still feel pain from it. But we are using this technique to free patients from narcotic dependency," said Svyatoslav Medvedev, the director of the institute.

The advantage of this method, which is also employed in other parts of Russia, is that it cures patients' psy-

chological as well as physical dependency. Medvedev said that with the classic detoxification cures, "only seven per cent of patients manage to overcome this psychological dependency."

"Our method makes the patient forget the sensation created by the narcotic and because of this, he loses the desire to take drugs," the doctor said.

Already, 15 drug abusers have had the operation in St. Petersburg and 10 more are on the waiting list.

"For our patients, this is their last chance to escape from drug addiction," surgeon Vladimir Nizkovoloz said. Every patient treated at the institute had attempted several cures but all had failed, he said.

"I had tried everything to get rid of my drug habit but nothing worked,"

Sirotkin said a few minutes after his operation.

He said he had been on drugs for five years and had lost most of his friends because of his addiction. "I wanted to live," he said, explaining that his parents had collected \$2,000 to pay for his operation.

After surgery, the patients stay three to four weeks at the hospital and when they leave they are able to begin their lives over again without drugs.

Svetlana, 19, had the operation two months ago. "I don't even think about drugs any more. I have gone back to my studies and am living a normal life again," she said.

There are officially 500,000 drug addicts registered in St. Petersburg — one person in every ten in this city of five million.

Jordan, Egypt inaugurate linkage of electricity grids tomorrow

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan and Egypt will tomorrow inaugurate the linking of their national electricity grids during a ceremony to be attended by His Majesty King Abdullah and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, according to Minister of Information Naser Lawzi.

In a press briefing following a regular Cabinet meeting Saturday, Lawzi said King Abdullah and Mubarak will meet in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Tabia before they both travel to Agaba. He added that the two leaders will discuss bilateral ties and developments in the peace process particularly on the Israeli-Palestinian track.

Lawzi told the press that the linkage project was financed by the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development through a \$500 million soft loan. Egypt is to be the cornerstone of the power grid

which will eventually link the Middle East, North Africa and Europe through Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, Spain and Italy.

Israel was to have joined the grid under regional economic projects aimed at cementing its peace agreements with Arab countries, but such schemes have withered since Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came to power in 1996.

Egypt and Libya joined their grids in May of last year while Egypt and Jordan connected their networks in October although the connection is officially being celebrated on Tuesday.

The connection between Egypt and Jordan, which joins the continents of Asia and Africa, cost \$500 million. The link between Jordan and Syria and between Syria and Turkey will take place later in the year but

Iraq will not join the grid until the year 2002 because of U.N. economic sanctions.

The links are based on the purchase and sale of electricity of different countries and are part of a larger project labelled "Mediterranean Power Pool," due to be operational by the year 2010. The entire project is being financed by the Arab Fund, the Islamic Development Bank and the European Investment Bank.

In his press briefing, Lawzi said that no date has been fixed for King Abdullah's visit to Damascus.

Commenting on the extension of the present ordinary session of the Lower House of Parliament, Lawzi said a Royal

Decree in this respect will be issued in the coming few days and the House's session will be extended until April 15. He said the extension will be made to enable the present government to submit its policy statement to Parliament to win a vote of confidence. He said the government will submit its policy statement on April 3.

Bassam Haddadin, the House's deputy speaker said the question of extension was discussed earlier with Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf Rawabdeh.

Lawzi noted that in accordance with Article 38 of the Constitution, the King can extend the ordinary session for a period of three more months.

Asfour says Ministry of Industry and Trade plans wide-ranging economic improvements

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Trade and Industry Mohammad Asfour said Sunday the ministry has a plan to upgrade all economic sectors, enhance investments, support industrial estates, lay down infrastructure and build workers' residences near these estates.

Asfour said Jordan proposed the construction of workers' houses during the visit of a UAE delegation to the Kingdom earlier this month, led by Sheikh Sultan Ben Zayed Al Nahayan.

Asfour said the UAE showed interest and readiness to help Jordan construct the houses.

The minister said that the trade ministry is currently preparing to establish a department to help citizens finish their transactions quickly and smoothly.

Asfour said the ministry will work with and support private sector investors. "We will support

exporters in reaching world markets through our future membership in the World Trade Organisation," said the minister.

He added the ministry will support the industrial cities, and that a full study will be carried out for all these estates to help lay down infrastructure.

Jordan and the UAE announced on March 9 the establishment of a joint investment company involving business communities from the two countries.

The new company will invest at least JD100 million in development projects in the Kingdom.

U.S. Treasury official: Global stability requires open markets

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The world economy's stability depends largely on unfettered international trade, the U.S. Treasury's Deputy Secretary Lawrence Summers said here Saturday.

"It is important that the world market stay open," Summers said at a meeting of the Transatlantic Commission, a consultative body that includes top U.S., Japanese and European economic officials.

To illustrate his point, the deputy secretary described a chain of ties linking worldwide economic growth with free trade. He said the global economy depends increasingly on U.S. growth, which in turn relies on robust spending by U.S. consumers. And they have invested more and more in recent years in financial markets, which rely

on free trade. Without referring directly to current tensions plaguing U.S.-European trade relations, Summers warned that a trend toward state-subsidised or state-protected markets would carry grave risks.

On a separate theme, he said a top goal now for the United States is to achieve a "soft landing" for its economy after eight consecutive years of growth.

For 1998, U.S. growth was just under four per cent. Economists expect 1999's performance will be just below 2.5 per cent.

"The U.S. expansion is a relatively healthy one — the growth of investment and exports has been relatively strong," Summers said, adding that inflation had been successfully held in check.

But he said it would be important for the U.S. savings rate to rise.

On Brazil, Summers said it was too early to tell whether Latin America's largest economy had stabilised, less than a week after the country's government reached agreement with the International Monetary Fund on revised conditions for aid.

But Summers predicted that investment capital will soon return to Brazil if authorities there can stabilise the situation, which he said is highly likely now that most international banks have committed to maintaining the fixed assets they currently have in the country.

The U.S. Treasury official also noted that Argentina and Mexico had done well at fending off contagion from Brazil's financial turmoil.

Exchange Rates Sunday, 14-03-99											
ACCESS 4648888											
CURRENCY	UNIT	JO	US	EURO	GBP	CHF	HKD	SGD	THB	TRY	JPY
JORDAN DINAR	1.0000	0.1888	0.1927	1.8777	1.8387	0.1945	2.3100	0.2077	0.7080		
SAUDI RIYAL	5.2973	1.0000	1.0208	9.8470	8.7403	1.0301	12.2365	1.1005	3.7505		
UAE DIRHAM	5.1853	0.8726	1.0000	9.7441	9.5418	1.0081	11.8669	1.0781	3.6740		
BAHRAIN DINAR	0.5326	0.1005	0.1028	1.0000	0.8792	0.1036	1.2302	0.1106	0.3771		
QATAR RIYAL	0.5439	0.1027	0.1048	1.0212	1.0000	0.1058	1.2563	0.1130	0.3851		
KATAR RIYAL	5.1427	0.8708	0.8910	9.6685	9.4559	1.0000	11.8793	1.0684	3.6410		
KUWAIT DINAR	0.4329	0.0817	0.0834	0.8129	0.7980	0.0842	1.0000	0.0859	0.3065		
EGYPT POUND	4.8138	0.9087	0.9276	8.0386	8.8508	0.9380	11.1191	1.0000	3.4080		
LIBERIAN LIRA	21.2288	4.0075	4.0808	39.8621	38.0339	4.1280	49.0375	4.4102	15.0300		
US DOLLAR	1.4124	0.2668	0.2722	2.6522	2.5971	0.2746	3.2626	0.2834	1.0000		
BRITISH STERLING	0.6652	0.1853	0.1867	1.8246	1.7909	0.1882	1.9898	0.1797	0.6126		
GERMAN MARK	2.5332	0.4782	0.4852	4.7957	4.6578	0.4926	5.8515	0.5283	1.7935		
SWITZERLAND FRA	2.0720	0.3911	0.3993	3.9907	3.8959	0.4029	4.7883	0.4305	1.4870		
FRANCE FRANC	8.4956	1.6038	1.6372	15.9525	15.6211	1.6520	19.6245	1.7649	8.0149		
JAPAN YEN	1.6787	0.3189	0.3235	3.1521	3.0868	0.3264	3.8777	0.3487	1.1885		
HOLLAND GUILDER	2.8541	0.5388	0.5500	5.3592	5.2479	0.5500	6.5928	0.5928	2.0207		
SWEDEN KRONA	11.4675	2.1648	2.2089	21.9330	21.0856	2.2259	26.4884	2.3823	17.7554		
ITALY LIRA	25.0782	4.7341	4.8327	47.0803	46.1119	4.8785	57.9285	5.2099	17.5504		
BELGIUM FRANC	62.2486	9.8832	10.0687	98.1090	96.0706	10.1558	120.6917	10.8545	36.9920		
AUSTRIA SILLING	2.9173	0.4186	0.4273	4.1835	4.0770	0.4312	5.1219	0.4606	1.5699		
CYPRUS POUND	0.7483	0.1413	0.1442	1.4051	1.3759	0.1455	1.7815	0.1655	0.5298		
AUSTRIA SILLING	17.8212	3.3642	3.4342	33.4635	32.7682	3.4854	41.1861	3.7023	12.6174		
CANADA DOLLAR	2.1532	0.4065	0.4148	4.0432	3.9592	0.4187	4.9739	0.4473	1.5245		
EURO	1.2946	0.2444	0.2485	2.4310	2.3804	0.2517	2.9905	0.2690	0.9169		

MAJOR CURRENCIES AGAINST JORDAN DINAR											
CURRENCY	UNIT	JO	US	EURO	GBP	CHF	HKD	SGD	THB	TRY	JPY
US DOLLAR	1.0000	1.6225	0.5578	0.8817	0.1883	0.8414	0.4949	5.6321	1.0910		
BRITISH STERLING	0.6125	1.0000	0.3415	0.4178	0.1018	0.5154	0.3031	3.4500	0.6883		
GERMAN MARK	1.7935	2.9279	1.0000	1.2226	0.2982	1.5090	0.8978	10.1012	1.9567		
SWITZERLAND FRA	1.4670	2.3949	0.8180	1.0000	0.2438	1.2343	0.7280	8.2623	1.6035		
FRANCE FRANC	8.0148	9.8193	3.3537	4.1001	1.0000	3.9009	2.9786	33.6795	6.5623		
JAPAN YEN	118.8500	194.0228	66.2871	81.0157	19.7993	1.0000	58.8163	689.3728	129.8654		
HOLLAND GUILDER	2.0207	3.2888	1.1787	1.3774	0.3388	1.7002	1.0000	11.3808	2.2046		
SWEDEN KRONA	8.1150	13.2543	4.5289	5.5344	1.3488	6.3313	4.0179	45.7289	8.8579		
ITALY LIRA	17.7554	28.9657	9.8989	12.1052	2.9519	14.9383	8.7968	1.0000	19.3711		
BELGIUM FRANC	35.8620	60.2684	20.6256	25.2181	8.1501	31.1249	18.3065	208.3423	40.3583		
AUSTRIA SILLING	1.5689	2.5826	0.8753	1.0701	0.2610	1.3209	0.7768	8.6416	1.7127		
GREEK DRACHMA	2.9705	4.8488	1.8563	2.0249	0.4839	2.4464	1.4700	18.7301	3.2408		
CYPRUS POUND	0.5298	0.8649	0.2954	0.3611	0.0881	0.4980	0.2822	2.9638	0.5780		
AUSTRIA SILLING	12.6174	20.5879	7.0351	8.6008	2.0877	10.6182	6.2441	71.0623	13.7856		
CANADA DOLLAR	1.5245	2.4887	0.8500	1.0392	0.2535	1.2827	0.7544	8.5861	1.6832		
EURO	0.9169	1.4963	0.5111	0.6248	0.1524	0.7712	0.4536	5.1623	1.0000		

WORLD STOCK MARKETS													
STOCK MARKET	INDEX	CLOSING	LAST	CHANGE	PRECIOUS METALS								
FRANKFURT	DAX	5008.18	4794.41	253.75	METAL	AMK	BID						
HONG KONG	HANG SENG	10801.78	10802.81	10.03	GOLD	292.10	292.80						
LONDON	FTSE 100	6282.20	6333.70	-51.50	SILVER	5.27	5.30						
NEW YORK	DJ INDUS	8878.35	8987.44	-109.09	PLATINUM	355.15	367.15						
NEW YORK	NYSE COMPOSITE	811.54	811.67	-0.13									
NEW YORK	AMEX COMPOSITE	721.21	721.65	-0.44									
NEW YORK	S&P 500	1294.59	1297.85	-3.26									
TOKYO	NIKKEI-225	15488.85	15502.14	-13.29									
PARIS	CAC 40	4175.03	4184.38	-9.35									

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THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

- Hot tubs
- Rile
- Painful throb
- Buckeye State
- Cove
- Dutch South African
- Talk-show neophyte
- Gore and Jolson
- Robert and Alan
- Frogs' kin
- Pizza order
- Excessively
- Copilot, e.g.
- To places
- Meg of "Sleepless in Seattle"
- Tweedie ending?
- Piers
- Mr. Baba
- Lama
- Play part
- Egyptian god of the sun
- Muse of lyric poetry
- Davis' Love III, e.g.
- Swallow
- Conjunctions
- Tabernacle table
- Middle measurement
- Blockhead
- Punt situation
- British princess
- Fred Astaire's sister
- Young adult
- Marsh growth
- Seamstress
- Identical

DOWN

- Couch
- Collins or Donahue
- False
- Mannerisms
- Distress letters
- Like the robbery
- City in Oklahoma
- Ata, Kazakhstan
- Dates regularly
- More indicator, briefly
- Flowering
- Soft drink flavor
- Pay attention to
- Goofs
- Contaminates
- Particle
- barrel
- Heavy weight
- Martyr of Egypt
- Time period
- Desert plants
- Enraged
- Synthetic fabric
- "Blame It on Rio" star
- '50s candidate
- Stevenson
- Peachy
- Sanders of football and baseball
- Look
- Marital
- Author's rep.
- Stood on hind legs
- Flit
- Team makeup
- From a distance
- Word with star or ranger
- Melody
- Walk in the water
- Once more
- Not working
- Neighborhood
- Pipe part
- "Auld Lang"
- Possesses
- Part of TGIF

Peanuts

YOU COULDN'T HIT SEVENTY-ONE HOME RUNS IF YOU PLAYED FOR A THOUSAND YEARS.

AND HIS NAME IS MARK MCGUIRE, NOT JOE MCGUIRE!

I GET HIM MIXED UP WITH JOE RUTH.

Andy Capp

ANDY'S GUESS TONIGHT: TED

HE WAS SUBSTITUTED JACK—I TOOK HIS PLACE

HE DID IT! I THOUGHT HE'D SHAKE MY ARM OFF!

TOH! WONDERED WHY YOU WERE DRINKING WITH YOUR LEFT HAND

I DON'T SUPPOSE HE WAS SPORTING ENOUGH TO SHAKE HANDS WITH YOU, EH?

Mutt'n'Jeff

OK, DALL! LET'S HAVE YOUR DOUGH! THIS IS A STINK-UP!

TAKE THAT AND THAT!

WHAT TH?

ONLY THIRTY-ONE CENTS! YOU COULDN'T GOT YOURSELF HILLED FIGHTIN' LIKE THAT FOR A MEASLY THIRTY-ONE CENTS!

OH YEAH! I GOT SIXTY BUCKS IN ONE SHOT AND MY BEST MONEY IN THE OTHER!

THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen

"We don't have children because my husband has Legophobia—the fear of stepping on Legos in bare feet."

JUMBLE THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

RYTUL

SYTTA

TOINNE

PREEW

THE PRESIDENT OF AN ELECTRIC COMPANY CAN BE FOUND HERE.

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

A: THE [] OF []

Saturday's Jumbles: VITAL EXTOL Answer: What the taxman gave the doctor — AN EXAMINATION

Serena serves notice with victory over Graf

INDIAN WELLS (AFP) — Serena Williams confirmed her arrival as a power on the WTA Tour Saturday with a triumph over former World No. 1 Steffi Graf for the Evert Cup crown.

"I know that I can win the big ones now," said the 17-year-old American, who shrugged off a sore knee and rallied from a break down in the third set to beat Graf 6-3, 3-6, 7-5.

"I don't know how many matches I've won in a row, but it's enough to win a Slam. It's seven in a row to win a Slam. I'm prepared to do that."

Williams' victory — with her sister, Venus, and father, Richard, looking on — was her 11th straight.

She won her first WTA Tour title in the Open Gaz de France in Paris on February 28 and immediately followed it up with her first triumph in a prestigious Tier One event.

The fact that she beat Graf, whose 106 career titles include 21 Grand Slam triumphs, made it even more satisfying.

"She has more titles than any man or lady playing tennis," Williams said. "It's very exciting for me to have this win."

"I definitely feel that I've beaten almost everyone, now that I'm on this roll," added Williams, who beat World No. 2 Lindsay Davenport in the second round here but is still waiting for her first victory over World No. 1 Martina Hingis.

"I just have a couple of more people to play. There's always someone out there who's going to work harder and who's going to try to beat me, especially when you're on a streak."

"I'm just going to have to work as hard, if not harder, to keep it up."

Williams, who stretched Hingis to three sets in the Lipton Championships last year and lost a three-set heartbreaker to Sandrine Testud at the Australian Open in January, said her new sense of urgency suddenly hit her last month.

"One day in practice I realised I had to make changes in my game if I wanted to get to the top level," she said. "I think that particular day in practice was what really made me change. It was just before I went to Paris."

"That's when I realized I can't keep going out there losing to people I should beat if I want to be a top player. I have to win more matches."

Now that she's got that down, Williams said the sky's the limit.

"I definitely think in the next couple of months I'll be in the top 10," said Williams, who will move up a spot from 17th to 16th thanks to her win over Graf.

"The only thing that can keep me out of the top 10 is if I quit playing tournaments for the rest of the year. Other than that, I definitely see myself getting there soon — and farther."



Serena Williams of the U.S. hits a backhand against Steffi Graf of Germany during the Evert Cup final in Indian Wells, California. Williams defeated Graf 6-3, 3-6, 7-5 to win the cup (AFP photo)



German tennis player Steffi Graf reacts after losing a point against Serena Williams of the U.S. at the Evert Cup final in Indian Wells, California. Williams won 6-3, 3-6, 7-5 (AFP photo)

Hassan hat-trick sounds Champions League warning

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — Veteran Egyptian star Hossam Hassan scored a hat-trick this weekend as Al-Ahly sounded an early warning to their African Champions League rivals with a 3-0 drubbing of Maji Maji in Tanzania.

Hassan, joint leading scorer with South African star Benni McCarthy at the 1998 Nations Cup in Burkina Faso, struck after 23, 52 and 86 minutes in the first leg of a first-round tie.

While former champions Al-Ahly can prepare for a second-round clash with Rayon Sport of Rwanda or AFC Leopards of Kenya in May, two-time winners Raja Casablanca of Morocco must overcome a 1-0 loss to Ndiambour in Senegal.

Makhene Ndiaye scored the last-minute winner in the north-west town of Louga to present an unexpectedly early challenge for Raja coach Luis Oscar Fullone.

The Argentinian guided ASEC of Cote d'Ivoire to the Champions League title last December with a 4-2 aggregate victory over surprise finalists Dynamos of Zimbabwe.

Villa of Uganda were the most impressive winners, crushing Electricity from Ethiopia 5-0 in Kampala with Phillip Sozzi and Andrew Mukasa scoring two goals each.

The return of Libya to the competition after a six-year break seems likely to be shortlived following the 2-1 home loss suffered by Al-Mahalla against 1994 champions Esperance from Tunisia.

Faycal Ben Ahmed, a midfielder in the 1998 Tunisian World Cup squad, opened and closed the scoring in Tripoli after Rejeb Ammar raised Libyan hopes with a second-half equaliser.

Orlando Pirates equalled the record victory margin for a South African club in Africa with a 6-0 thrashing of Botswana Defence Force, who survived only 10 minutes before Simon Makhubela triggered a Johannesburg goal avalanche.

Newcomers Wikki Tourists of Nigeria also began impressively by defeating Renaissance 4-0 in Kaduna, where Chiedozie Johnson struck twice during the second half.

Moya makes unlikely leap to the top

INDIAN WELLS (AFP) — Carlos Moya became the unlikely World No. 1 here Saturday, and as Gustavo Kuerten, the man he beat to get there, said, it couldn't happen to a nicer guy.

Moya was one of four players who started the \$2.45 million Champions Cup with a chance to unseat Pete Sampras.

The smart money was on second-ranked Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov, who had already come within one match of claiming the top spot in February.

Kuerten took care of him in the second round. With Sampras, World No. 3 Alex Corretja and No. 5 Pat Rafter all early losers, Moya found himself in the enviable, but nervewracking, position of challenging for No. 1.

"You cannot say, 'OK, don't think about that, just play your match,'" Moya said. "The night before, the morning, it always came to my mind. I tried not to think about it. To play videos, watch movies. I was four matches away, it was still far. I had to play every match step-by-step."

Moya, the reigning French Open champion, was the only man to reach the semi-finals without dropping a set.

Kuerten, the 1997 Roland Garros champion, ruined that record, taking advantage of Moya's second-set jitters to stretch the Spaniard to a 6-3, 1-6, 6-1 score.

"The key of the match was the beginning of the third," Moya said. "When I broke him and then held my serve for three-love, I thought I had a good chance to win."

Moya, battling a shoulder injury and the flu, had made a mediocre start to the year. He lost in the second round at Sydney and in the first round of the Australian Open and at Marseille.

He turned the corner when he reached the semifinals at Dubai last month, and he credited coach Jose Perles and fitness trainer Luis Miguel Morales with pulling him through the rough patch.

"When you are playing that bad, you think there's no way out, you cannot put the ball in even. You cannot understand how you won a few matches before."

"They always trusted me a lot. They showed me there was a way out. In Dubai I started to play better ... I came here and started to play better and better."

After hugging Kuerten, Moya rounded up Morales and Perles, joined hands with them and leapt 10 times in the air.

He said the jumps are normally assigned to the loser in their football kick-outs. "You know, when you lose you have to do 10 jumps," Moya said. "Today I didn't lose, but it was like a bet, that if I become number one everyone has to go on the court and jump 10 times."

Moya, the 15th man to claim the number one spot since the rankings were introduced in 1973, was presented with a crystal trophy by Australian John Newcombe, the second man ever to top the list.

Then Moya, who admitted unplugging his phone earlier in the week to avoid calls about the rankings, called home.

"My parents and my brother, they were almost crying," he said. "This is the moment which we've been always waiting for."

Kuerten was disappointed not to reach the final, but happy for his friend.

"He's been a friend of mine for five years already. He was already on the top. I was just one player. He's not like he didn't talk to me or anything like that."

"I'm not happy because he beat me, but to see they way he's celebrated with his coach, all together since they've been working a long time. It's nice to see."

Moya, whose Grand Slam history also includes a runner-up finish in Australia and a semifinal appearance at the U.S. Open, said he didn't expect his life to change, and he didn't expect his new status to affect the camaraderie he feels with other Spanish players like Corretja.

"Well, he beat me in Hannover. That time he was No. 3 in the world and I was No. 5. I was still talking to him."

"I think everything is going to be the same. I'm going to be the same person out of the court. I hope."

Nervous Sydney organisers await probe results

SYDNEY (AFP) — Nervous Sydney Olympic organisers are bracing for the potentially damaging release Monday of an independent report into the city's bid for the 2000 Games.

The inquiry, initiated by the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG), will reveal whether the A\$28 million (\$17.5 million) campaign was conducted fairly or was riddled with corruption.

If former auditor of South Australia state Tom Sheridan finds damaging evidence in more than 3,000 files relating to the Olympic bid it will be referred to the police or the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Sydney beat Beijing by two votes to win the Games.

The Olympic movement is already at its lowest ebb after Salt Lake City's admission that it gave cash and other inducements to at least 25 International Olympic Committee members in its bid to win the 2002 Winter Games.

Australian IOC delegate Phil Coles was last week recommended for severe censure in an IOC report into the scandal, after allegedly accepting more than \$60,000 in hospitality from Salt Lake City officials.

Just hours before the report was made public he quit the Australian Olympic Committee, saying he had been careless and had damaged the movement.

SOCOG chief executive Sandy Hollway has admitted public confidence has been rocked by the scandal. With Sydney still 200 million dollars short of its target for sponsorship revenues, any further hiccups could be disastrous.

With ticket sales worth more than \$250 million to Sydney due to start on May 30, the last thing SOCOG needs is another distraction.

"I want it cleaned up, I want it out of the way. I want it dealt with," Hollway said recently of the corruption claims.

The IOC's 11 biggest sponsors and numerous local Australian sponsors have also made it clear they want swift reform, and dismissal for errant officials.

As one leading Australian sponsor said recently: "We used to be told what we could or couldn't do with our marketing rights. Now that attitude has seriously turned around. We call the shots."

For weeks newspapers here have speculated that all is not above board in Sydney. But they doubt whether the probe will find any wrongdoing over hospitality expenses because SOCOG kept no itemised accounts of entertaining.

The Sydney Morning Herald, at the forefront of a "come clean" campaign, says expenditures were either never put through the bid's accounts or were paid directly by sponsors or private individuals.

About 65 IOC members officially came to Sydney on their one allotted visit although another 100 trips were arranged for officials acting in their capacity as members of the 26 Olympic sporting federations, the paper has reported.

Sue Busby, who managed the hospitality programme at the time, claims some IOC members were given special attention.

"They (the select IOC members) had part of their private itineraries handled by senior members of the bid company," she said.

The Herald has also claimed that 12 IOC members enjoyed free holidays at luxurious beach resorts in Queensland state.

Sydney has admitted contributing \$20,000 to the cost of shipping seven takhi ponies — Mongolia's national symbol — from an Australian zoo to Mongolia after an IOC member from that country visited during the bid process.

It was further dragged into the row after AOC president John Coates, who spearheaded the city's bid, admitted making last-minute funding offers worth \$2.0 million to African officials on the eve of the 1993 vote for the 2000 Games.

That was seen as acceptable bid tactics and IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch has said Sydney did nothing wrong.

Australian IOC member Kevan Gosper also says he would be stunned if any bribery was exposed. "Sydney worked within the rules and worked competently in an extraordinarily competitive environment," he said.

Cinema Theatre Cinema Theatre Cinema Theatre Cinema Theatre

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Robert De Niro... in

RONIN

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CINEMA TEL:463-4144
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FORREST GUMP

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, 9:00

CINEMA TEL:5699238
PLAZA

Comedian Adel Imam... in

AL ZA'EEM

Shows: 12:15, 3:15, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL:5677420
CONCORDE

Adel Imam & Wafa' Amer... in

ALWAD MAHROUS BTA' AL WAZIR
Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30
CONCORDE 2 FEAR

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GALLERIA 1

ABDOUN
www.cns.com.jo/Galleria

DANCE WITH ME

Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:45

CINEMA TEL:5634793
GALLERIA 2

ABDOUN
www.cns.com.jo/Galleria

Michael Douglas... in

A PERFECT MURDER

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390 taekwondo players prepare for Amman tournament

By a Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Around 390 taekwondo players from seven Arab and Asian countries will mark the 40-day mourning period of the passing away of His Majesty King Hussein by taking part in a two-day international championship here.

Players from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon and Chinese Taipei will participate in the First Amman International Championship for men and women, organised by Jordan's Champions Centre for Taekwondo on March 18-19 at the Palace of Sports.

President of the Championship's Higher Committee Wa'el Kamal said round-the-clock preparations will reflect positively on the activity, which will held for the first time.

"The vast participation in the championship will help support the game, especially that it will come ahead of the 9th Pan-Arab Games and the 2000 Sydney Olympics," Kamal told reporters on Sunday.

International referees from Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, Cyprus, Kuwait and Hong Kong will be officiating the matches which will have an electronic scoring system.

Four coaches headed by Samer Kamal train around 2000 players and another 100

black-belt holders at the eight-year-old Champions Centre.

Among these players are Wisam Abu Seif, who holds three dan black belt and won the golden medal in the 1993 national team qualifiers; Zaha Talhouni, the Kingdom's current champion, who holds a three dan black belt and won the 1997-1998 Arab championship and Ala' Kutkut, who holds a two dan black belt and won the silver in the 1998 Asian Games.

Kamal, currently president of Arab Referees Committee, holds six international, Olympic and Asian medals and was honoured for his achievements by the late King Hussein with the Independence Medal in 1988.

With this selection, the centre won Jordan's under-13 Championship in the years 1991-93 and 1995-98; the 13-16 year-olds championship in the same years; the 13-16 year-olds championship for men in 1992; the 15-17 year-olds championship for men in 1992 and 1994 and the championship of women's categories since 1991.

In 1991 and 1992, the centre took part in organising Al Orthodox Club International Championship and also organised the first women's championship in 1994, the second in 1995 and the third in 1996.

Chelsea's title dreams fade

LONDON (AFP) — Chelsea's Italian manager Gianluca Vialli admitted the battle for the English Premiership title was a two-horse race between Manchester United and Arsenal after the top two won and his side suffered their second home defeat in a row on Saturday.

Two goals by Andy Cole against his old club gave treble-chasing United a 2-1 victory at Newcastle; while Arsenal had Emmanuel Petit sent off for the third time this season but still won 2-0 at Everton.

Chelsea, who suffered their first home loss of the season when Manchester United knocked them out of the FA Cup on Wednesday, went down at Stamford Bridge for the first time in the league this season, 1-0 to West Ham.

Paul Kitson's 75th-minute strike for West Ham meant they are a full seven points behind United and three behind Arsenal even though they still have a game in hand.

But fourth-placed Leeds are now only two points worse off and Vialli said: "It's now a two-horse race between Arsenal and Manchester United."

"The players are disappointed as we now know that our title hopes are fading away."

"We will do our best to finish in the best possible position but looking at Arsenal and United, it will be very difficult indeed."

It was 1-1 between relegation-threatened pair Coventry and Blackburn at Highfield Road, the goals coming from John Aloisi in the 22nd minute and the Rovers equaliser from Jason Wilcox in the 67th.

Nottingham Forest, certainties in most people's minds to go down, gave themselves a lifeline with an unlikely 3-1 win over Wimbledon at Selhurst Park.

Alan Rogers's cross-cut shot put Forest, still eight points adrift of safety, ahead after 21 minutes.

"I said: 'What a bad cross that lovely goal is,'" quipped Forest manager Ron Atkinson afterwards.

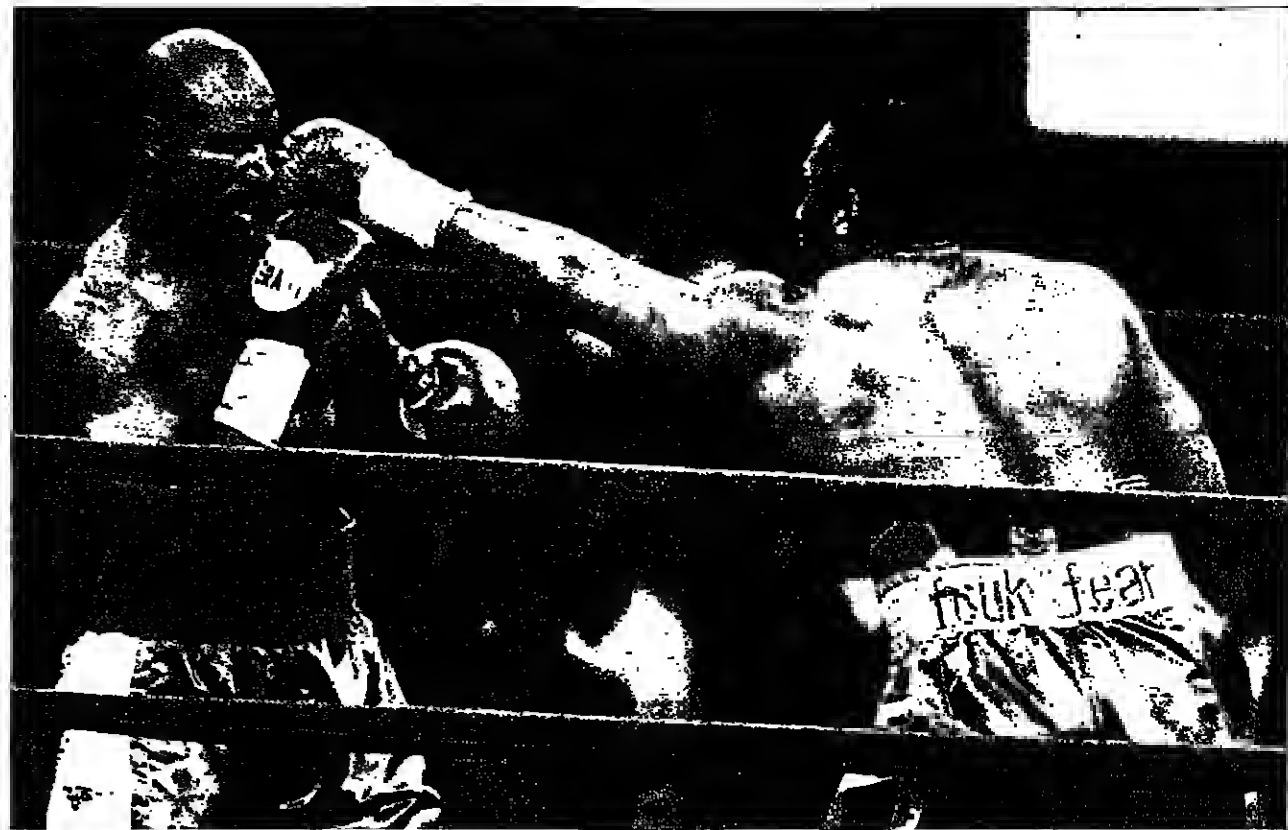
Dougie Freedman (59) and Neil Shipperley (34) completed a deserved fourth win of the season.

Marcus Gayle's 79th minute effort for Wimbledon was the highlight of a poor display which will have done little for the health of manager Joe Kinnear, who is recovering from a heart attack.

Charlton, also desperately in need of points down at the bottom, had to settle for a 1-1 draw with Leicester at Filbert Street.

But they were bappy with the point after going a goal down to a Neil Lennon strike on the hour, then baving Keith Jones sent off for a second yellow card and rescuing a draw only when Clive Mendonca equalised in injury time.

In-form Tottenham, meanwhile, showed out-of-form Aston Villa no mercy and won 1-0 at White Hart Lane thanks to an 88th-minute goal from Tim Sherwood.



IBF and WBA heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield (L) of the U.S. gets hit in the face with a punch by WBC heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis (R) of Britain in the first round of their fight at Madison Square Garden in New York (AFP photo)

Lewis-Holyfield showdown ruled controversial draw

NEW YORK (AFP) — Britain's Lennox Lewis outclassed, Evander Holyfield for 12 rounds before Saturday only to be denied the undisputed world heavyweight boxing title when judges scored the fight a draw.

None of the few hard blows Holyfield landed was as harsh as the one delivered by judges, who robbed Lewis of victory in a travesty after a fight where his superior size and reach kept Holyfield at bay.

South African Judge Stanley Christodolou awarded the fight to Lewis 116-113, American Judge Jean Williams went for Holyfield 115-113 and British Judge Larry O'Connor called the fight a 115-115 draw.

The long-awaited fight left a bitter taste in the mouth of a sellout crowd of 21,284 at Madison Square Garden. Boos greeted the

decision and the mention of promoter Don King's name.

The result meant Holyfield, 36, kept the World Boxing Association and International Boxing Federation titles while Lewis, 33, remained the World Boxing Council champion.

The verdict, almost certain to spark a rematch where promoters will again try to cash in on unification, left Lewis 34-1 and Holyfield 36-3 with the first draws of their careers.

About 7,000 Lewis fans were chanting and cheering as if it were Wembley Stadium, many waving the Union Jack to back their man.

Lewis would have become the first undisputed heavyweight champion from Britain since Bob Fitzsimmons lost the crown a century ago.

Holyfield was unable to

get near the larger Lewis most of the fight and given nothing to counterpunch by Lewis, who used his larger size and reach to maximum effectiveness.

Lewis kept Holyfield at bay with his left jab, denying Holyfield the chance to come inside. Holyfield landed only 7 of 17 punches in round one and 8 of 24 in round two.

In the third, the round Holyfield predicted he would knock out Lewis, he came out aggressive and even backed Lewis into a corner. Holyfield scored with hooks and uppercuts but Lewis effectively countered.

Lewis stunned Holyfield in the fifth, connecting with a right to the head after Holyfield fell forward following a miss. Lewis followed with a series of punches while Holyfield covered against the ropes

and again struggled to get within punching range past the left hand of Lewis.

Lewis dominated as the fight wore on, often lowering his hands to entice Holyfield to draw near.

Holyfield had landed only 68 punches through seven rounds, barely a third of Lewis' total, and the ratio changed little over the last rounds.

Lewis raised his right fist in triumph after the 11th round and again in the final seconds of the last round even as Holyfield clung to him. As the final bell sounded, Lewis yelled "Yes."

The three major heavyweight titles were to have been reunited for the first time since Riddick Bowe dropped the WBC belt in a trash can in December of 1992.

Jazz quintet swing past Timberwolves

SALT LAKE CITY (R) — The old reliable Jazz quintet proved fresher and better attuned than the younger, road-weary Minnesota Timberwolves on Saturday as league-leading Utah scored a 99-72 victory.

Karl Malone scored 26 points and Greg Ostertag grabbed a season-high 14 rebounds and the Jazz handed the Timberwolves their worst loss of the season as both teams played their third game in as many nights.

"We were able to catch these guys at a good time," Jazz guard John Stockton said. "They came in here on the third night of a back-to-back-to-back just like us, only they were a little disorganised with the new players and all."

The Timberwolves were playing their first game with new point guard Terrell Brandon, who was acquired from Milwaukee in a blockbuster three-team trade Thursday that sent Stephon Marbury to New Jersey.

Stockton handed out 10 assists for the Jazz, who won their fourth straight game and their NBA-best 17th victory.

Kevin Gammet scored 22 points for Minnesota (13-8) in Houston. Hakeem Olajuwon continued his resurgence. Charles Barkley reached a milestone, Scottie Pippen dominated in the fourth quarter and the bot-shooting Houston Rockets kept rolling with a 100-89 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers.

Olajuwon scored 24 points to lead the Rockets in scoring. "I'm progressing as the season progresses," Olajuwon said.

"I feel much more comfortable and I'm getting into the flow of the game better."

I'm comfortable and feeling stronger," Barkley joined Wilt Chamberlain and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar as the only players in NBA history with 20,000 points, 10,000 rebounds and 4,000 assists. Barkley, who needed one assist to accomplish the feat, collected 15 points, 10 rebounds and six assists.

"It's a real great honour and I'm glad it's behind me," Barkley said.

Pippen scored half of his 16 points in the final period, when the Rockets saw their lead shrink to four before pulling away. Pippen added 10 assists and eight rebounds.

In Oakland, the Orlando Magic halted a three-game losing streak with an 87-74 victory over the Golden State Warriors.

In Los Angeles, the Clippers' winning streak ended at one game as Brian Grant scored a season-high 25 points and grabbed 14 rebounds to lead the Portland Trail Blazers (16-4) to a 106-96 overtime victory.

In San Antonio, the Denver Nuggets came up very short against the twin towers of the San Antonio Spurs.

With no one in the starting lineup taller than 6-9 (2.06 m), the Nuggets were smothered by seven-footers (2.13 m) Tim Duncan and David Robinson, setting a club record for fewest points in a 92-61 loss.

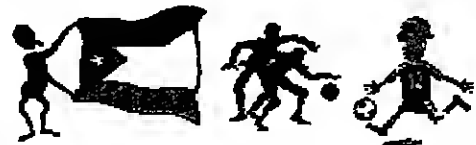
In Atlanta, Alan Henderson scored a season-high 24 points and Dikembe Mutombo added 16 points and 13 rebounds as the Atlanta Hawks beat the Toronto Raptors 86-75.

In Dallas, the lowly Mavericks handed the woeful Vancouver Grizzlies their 11th straight defeat.

71-74. Hubert Davis buried four 3-pointers in the fourth quarter and Michael Finley scored 21 points to help the Mavericks post their second straight victory after a four-

game losing streak. The game was delayed briefly due to a slippery substance on the floor, a problem which delayed the Mavericks' home game on Tuesday by 70 minutes.

LOCAL SPORTS SCENE



Boxers to get cash awards

AMMAN — Jordan Boxing Federation Vice-President Mohammad 'Eitan has pledged to award players who achieve medals in the 9th Pan-Arab Games (Al Hussein Games). In a meeting with the national team, 'Eitan said JD1,000 will be granted to those who would win the gold, JD500 for the silver and JD250 will go to boxers who would win the bronze. 'Eitan told the team that some obstacles facing a number of players, were under careful study. These include Mohammad Abu Khadijeh, who faces no competition in his category here and will thus participate in the Bangkok Championship in April and in a training camp in Kazakhstan. Other players will be trained in line with preparations as the Iraqi team will play here in April followed by a training camp in Tunisia.

Table tennis team to play in Beirut

AMMAN — The Jordan Table-Tennis Federation is currently preparing to take part in the Arab Federation Championship, which will be held in Beirut March 17-22. Tadiana Najjar and Alia Tuffaha will represent the women's team, while Mustafa Redha and Iyad Meknai will represent the men's team. Tuffaha and Abdul Aziz Redha achieved the bronze in the previous event.

Syrian volleyball team arrives today

AMMAN — The Syrian women's volleyball team is expected to arrive on Monday to play three friendlies against the national team as part of preparations for the 9th Pan-Arab Games. The Iraqi men's volleyball team is expected to arrive here on Friday to play friendlies against the Jordanian counterparts.

Compiled by Ahmad Khatib

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Iranian footballers head to U.S.

TEHRAN (AFP) — Three renowned Iranian footballers are en route to the United States for a ceremony marking the historic Iran-U.S. match in last year's World Cup, the official news agency IRNA said Sunday. Hamid Estili, Ahmad-Reza Abedzadeh and Mohammad Khakpour were invited by a U.S.-based Iranian cultural group, IRNA said without giving further details. Iran won last summer's World Cup match 2-1 in the most important sporting competition between the two nations since Washington broke off diplomatic relations with Iran following the 1979 hostage-taking at the U.S. embassy in Tehran.

Mexicans capture 3rd consecutive U.S. Cup title

SAN DIEGO (AFP) — Juan Manuel Abundis scored in the 57th minute to give Mexico a 2-1 victory over the United States here Saturday, giving the Mexicans their third consecutive U.S. Cup title. The defeat was the first for the U.S. team since Bruce Arena took over as coach last November. The U.S. team, a last-place finisher in last year's World Cup at France, had won three and drew two in the run.

NBA			
Atlanta	86	Toronto	75
Dallas	91	Vancouver	74
Houston	100	Cleveland	89
San Antonio	92	Denver	61
Utah	99	Minnesota	72
Orlando	87	Golden State	74
Portland	106	LA Clippers	96 (OT)
Italian League			
Juventus	2	Udinese	1
AS Roma	3	Bologna	1
Parma	2	Bari	1
Inter Milan	2	AC Milan	2
Spanish League			
Atletico Madrid	1	Real Mallorca	2
Real Zaragoza	0	Celta Vigo	1
R. Santander	1	Real Madrid	3
Real Betis	0	Valencia	1
French Cup round of last 16			
Guingamp	1	Lille	1
Amiens	1	Sedan	2
Angoulême	1	Troyes	0
Clermont	0	Le Mans	2
Montagnarde	0	Rouen	2
Lens	1	Laval	1 (AET)
Laval won 4-2 on penalties			
German League			
Werder Bremen	0	Wolfsburg	1
Schalke	2	VfL Bochum	2
Kaiserslautern	2	Nuremberg	0
1860 Munich	1	VfB Stuttgart	1
Hamburg SV	0	Bayern Munich	2
Moncheng.	0	MSV Duisburg	2
Portuguese League			
Chaves	2	Guimaraes	3
FC Porto	3	Uniao Leiria	1
Dutch First Division			
Heerenveen	2	RKC Waalwijk	0
PSV Eindhoven	3	C. Leeuwarden	0
W. II Tilburg	2	De Graafschap	0
Belgian First Division			
G. Ekeren	1	Lierse	1
Westerlo	3	Standard Liege	1
St-Truiden	7	Lokeren	0
Lommel	0	Harelbeke	1
Beveren	1	Genk	0
Anderlecht	2	Aalst	1
Charleroi	2	Kortrijk	1
China vs. Iran friendly			
China	1	Iran	0

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Netanyahu denies policy change on freeing Palestinian prisoners

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied reports Sunday that his government had dropped its headline refusal to free Palestinians jailed for carrying out attacks on Israelis.

Speaking during a cabinet meeting, Netanyahu said he would never order the release of Palestinians "with blood on their hands, those who either wounded or killed Israelis, because we have not changed our criteria for freeing security prisoners."

But Netanyahu acknowledged that his government was considering freeing some Palestinian detainees as a "goodwill gesture" for the Muslim fast of the sacrifice, 'Eid Al Adha, which falls this year on March 27, his office said.

The prisoner issue is one of the most emotional for the Palestinians and Israel's refusal to release detainees "with blood on their hands" sparked widespread rioting in the occupied territories last year which in turn contributed to the breakdown of the Wye River peace accord.

Netanyahu was responding to a newspaper report that Israeli and Palestinian officials have secretly worked out a compromise deal to release

100 Palestinians political prisoners.

The Yediot Ahranot newspaper reported that Israel had agreed to ease its stance and would release some Palestinians convicted of involvement in attacks in which Israelis were hurt but not killed.

Those released were to be members of PLO chief Yasser Arafat's Fateh movement who have spent more than 10 years in jail and served at least two-thirds of their sentences, the newspaper said.

Yediot said Israeli Internal Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani negotiated the compromise with PLO deputy leader Mahmoud Abbas and chief peace negotiator Saeb Erekat and was currently finalising the list of releasable prisoners.

Kahalani's office declined to either confirm or deny the report, and there was no immediate comment from the Palestinian National Authority.

Palestinian sources estimate that around 3,000 Palestinians are held in Israeli jails and some 2,000 of these were convicted of politically motivated crimes, most of them committed before the first Israeli-PLO peace accord was signed in 1993.

The Palestinians say barely 200 of the prisoners actually killed Israelis and the majority were not directly involved in bloody actions but belonged to groups behind such attacks.

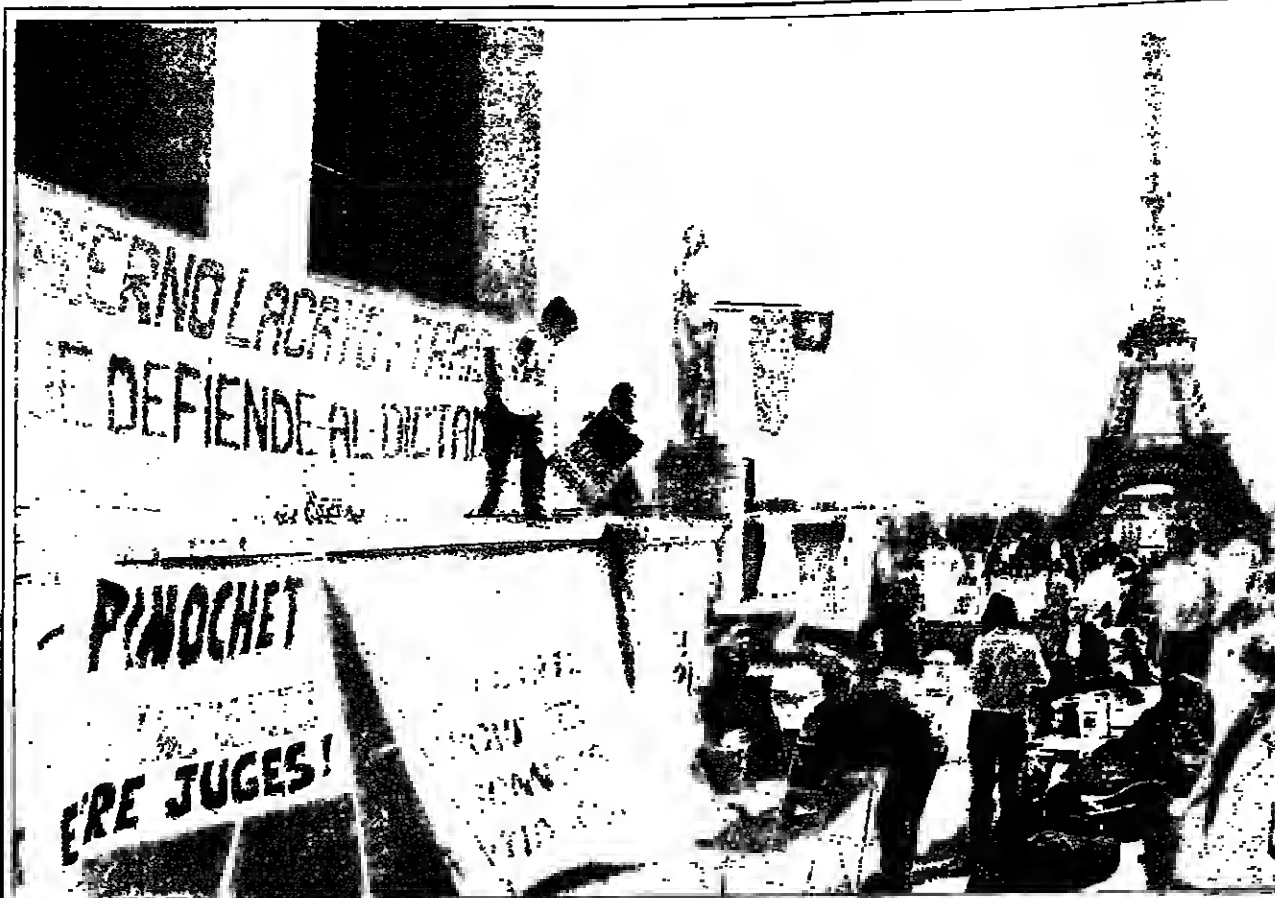
Under the Wye River interim peace accord signed last October in Washington, Israel agreed to release 750 Palestinian prisoners in three batches to coincide with staged further withdrawals from the West Bank.

Israel released a first group of 250 prisoners in tandem with a first troop pullback in November, but only 100 of them were political detainees and the rest common criminals.

The Wye accord does not state explicitly which categories of prisoners were to be released, but the PNA maintains that it referred only to political prisoners.

Netanyahu's headline on the issue triggered three weeks of violence across the West Bank at the end of last year in which four Palestinians were killed and scores injured.

The outbreak of violence was one of the reasons given by Israel for suspending implementation of the Wye accord in December, in particular the second and third troop pullouts from the West Bank.



ANTI-PINOCHET DEMO IN HUMAN RIGHTS SQUARE: Protesters take part in an anti-Pinochet demonstration Sunday on the Human Rights Square in Paris, ahead of Chilean President Eduardo Frei's official visit to France on Monday. Former Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet is under police custody in London fighting extradition to Spain, where a judge wants to try him for human rights violations during his 1973-90 dictatorship (AP photo)

Eight executed for attacks on Iraqi clerics

BAGHDAD (AP) — Eight Iraqi men were executed for assassinating two senior Shiite Muslim clerics last year and attacking another, the state-run Al Jumhuriya daily reported Sunday.

The men were hanged on Saturday after a state security court sentenced them to death, the paper said. It did not say when or where the trial was held.

The paper gave the names of the eight men but did not say which attacks each of the men was involved in.

Several Shiite clergymen have been killed in Iraq in recent years. The government, which is dominated by Sunni Muslims, has blamed the attacks on foreign countries.

Al Jumhuriya said the eight

men confessed to the crimes "and they will be given their just penalty." The paper said that those convicted included assassins who killed Ayatollah Murtadha Ali Mohammed Borujerdi in April last year. He was gunned down in the Shiite religious city of Najaf, 160 kilometres south of Baghdad.

Al Jumhuriya said some of the men also were convicted in the death of Ayatollah Mirza Ali Gharavi, who was shot and killed last June as he was being driven to his home in Najaf.

Some also were involved in an attack on another senior cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the paper said.

It was the first disclosure

that there was an attack in November 1996 aimed at Sistani, who now is the highest ranking Shiite cleric in Najaf. The paper did not say when the incident occurred. It said that two of Sistani's bodyguards were killed but that the cleric was unhurt.

There have been no reports of convictions in other cases involving attacks on clerics. Ayatollah Bashir Hussein Al Bakistani was injured in January when an assailant threw a grenade into his office in Najaf.

Three people visiting him were killed, Iraqi newspapers reported at the time.

The supreme religious leader before Sistani, Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq Al Sader, was assassinated in

February along with two of his sons in Najaf.

Iraqi dissidents blamed the Saders' deaths on the government of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, and there were reports of riots in a low-income Shiite suburb in Baghdad as well as Shiite cities in the south.

The government denied there were any disturbances.

At least one man has been arrested in connection with the Sader case, Iraqi media have reported.

In an attempt to show government concern for the Shiites, state-run newspapers reported Sunday that Saddam has donated 450 million dinars (\$225,000) to refurbish a Shiite Muslim shrine in Najaf.

'Syria must drop Golan demand before talks resume'

ABU GOSH (AFP) — Defence Minister Moshe Arens said Sunday that renewed U.S. efforts to revive peace talks between Israel and Syria would succeed only if Damascus dropped its conditions concerning a return of the Golan Heights.

"Attempts to renew the peace negotiations with Syria are totally one-sided," Arens said as a senior U.S. official was in Damascus to discuss peace efforts and the crisis in Lebanon.

"As long as Damascus sticks by its demand for the full return of the Golan Heights as a condition for resuming negotiations, they will not resume," Arens said during a campaign visit to this Arab town outside Jerusalem.

He spoke as the top U.S. State Department official for the Middle East, Martin Indyk, met in Damascus with Foreign Minister Farouk Al Shara on the peace process.

Indyk, a former ambassador to Israel, said afterwards the two men discussed "how to prepare the ground for an effort to resume the negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks after the Israeli elections" in May.

Israel-Syria negotiations were suspended three years ago before the right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came to power in

May 1996 elections.

During the talks, Israel's previous Labour government agreed to the principle of trading territory on the Golan Heights in return for peace with Syria.

Netanyahu has refused Syrian demands that the peace talks resume where they left off.

In the absence of an Israeli-Syrian accord, Israel has also been unable to end the fighting in Lebanon, the last active battlefield in the Arab-Israeli conflict where Israel occupied a buffer zone along the neighbouring state's southern border.

Lebanon, which is dominated by Syria, has refused to negotiate separately with Israel, demanding either a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon or a negotiated regional peace including a Golan pullout.

A recent spate of troop losses in Lebanon, including the killing by Syria-backed guerrillas of Israel's top general in the zone, has increased pressure on the Israeli government to resolve the conflict.

Opposition Labour Party chief and prime ministerial candidate Ehud Barak, who leads Netanyahu in most opinion polls, had promised if elected to withdraw from Lebanon within a year and resume peace negotiations with Syria.

World's top weapons makers deploy in Gulf

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Despite a cash crunch, the world's top arms manufacturers deployed in force at a defence exhibition which opened here Sunday in the Gulf, a region which has seen two major conflicts in as many decades.

Sheikh Ben Zayed Al Nahayan, deputy supreme commander of the Emirati armed forces, opened the five-day fair which has attracted more than 800 exhibitors — a record for the biannual show launched in 1993 — from 40 countries.

The show comes on the heels of a slight recovery in oil prices, which last year fell more than 30 per cent.

"It's all oil-related in this region. There's already a new air of optimism with oil prices on the way up," said defence analyst Paul Beaver, referring to an accord last week to slash more than two million barrels a day off world output.

Britain tops the list of exhibitors, followed by France and the United States, while Bosnia and Kuwait are among the newcomers along with Iran, making a debut despite an island dispute with the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The UAE itself is in the market to build up its navy with six patrol boats, eight corvettes and at least 10 fast interceptor vessels, with the smaller craft likely to be awarded locally.

"Their priority is still the air force. Until they clear the decks on aircraft and with depressed oil prices, we don't expect any major contract from the navy,"

said a European ship industry executive.

Last year, the UAE agreed in principle to purchase 80 F-16 Block 60 fighters from U.S. manufacturer Lockheed Martin. But the negotiations have reportedly stalled over codes for electronic warfare systems.

A UAE military spokesman on Sunday ruled out rival bids but stressed a final contract needed more time because of "complex" negotiations.

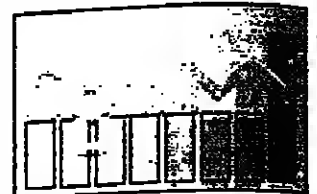
"The selection has been made last year for the F-16. The deal is going on and we have no ambiguity on that," Colonel Staff Obeid Al Kitbi told reporters.

"It's a major defence project which takes time and effort from all parties," he said. "We have no timeframe [for a final deal] because of the complexity of the negotiations."

U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen, on a visit to Abu Dhabi last week, expressed guarded confidence that the \$6 billion sale was still on track. "I think we are moving ahead with the proposal. We hope to continue to make progress on it."

The UAE wants the fighter to be capable of identifying other U.S.-made warplanes as potential foes, something which the Pentagon has resisted, according to U.S. defence officials.

Industry sources said British Aerospace is hoping to "piggyback" a contract for Hawk trainer aircraft following the UAE's purchase of 30 Mirage 2000-9 combat aircraft.



Ski resort to end nude tradition

DENVER (AFP) — The Colorado ski resort of Crested Butte has banned nude skiing on its slopes next month, putting an end to an annual event that began 25 years ago. The practice of skiing in the buff on the last day of the season has become an embarrassment for this posh yet family-friendly resort south of Aspen. Last year hundreds of nude skiers from across the U.S. west took over the resort's slopes and solariums as scores of sightseers recorded the action with video cameras. To ensure that skiers are properly attired on April 18, the resort's final day, the resort announced it had formed a special patrol to comb the resort for violators.

Swiss 'jail break king' behind bars

BERN (AP) — Walter Stuenkel, widely known as Switzerland's "jail break king," is back behind bars. Police said that Stuenkel was arrested on suspicion of taking part in a 100,000 Swiss franc (\$68,000) armed robbery of a bank along with an escaped convict. He was released from jail last October after serving a 10-year sentence for robbery. Stuenkel, 57, has achieved near cult status in Switzerland for breaking out of prison eight times. "Gone looking for Easter eggs," was a typically cheeky message he left behind for wardens on one occasion.

French hamlet calmly awaits obliteration

CHAMBERY (AFP) — A 2,500-tonne boulder sat poised Sunday to topple on to the hamlet of Saint-Jean in the French Alps, while residents evacuated from their homes below looked on. "We can't complain," said Danielle, 35, who was one of 76 residents hurriedly evacuated four days ago when the boulder's tilt accelerated dramatically. She said she and her family had been relocated into a comfortable, modern apartment in La Tania ski resort above the boulder. "My older daughter is delighted because she can go outside to ski," Danielle said. The massive rock has been closely monitored since a series of landslides in 1974. But when the average one millimetre a month tilt accelerated to 8.3 millimetres a day, the evacuation order was given.

Food critic ends secrecy efforts

NEW YORK (AFP) — After consuming 2,800 restaurant meals in more than five years of writing food reviews for the New York Times, Ruth Reichl is about to abandon the cloak-and-dagger routine. Reichl, 51, will stop wearing wigs, fake glasses, and other disguises as she moves to a new job as head of the monthly cooking and travel "Gourmet" magazine. "In three weeks, it's over — no more wigs. It'll be so great," Reichl exclaimed during a recent luncheon with AFP, which she had concealed her black curly hair under a blond wig and her face behind thick-framed fake glasses.

Government announces reward for rat catchers

GAUHATI (AP) — Wanted: rats, dead or alive. A government in a remote northeastern Indian state is offering a cash reward to anyone bringing a rat tail. With thousands of big rodents feasting on foodgrains, tribespeople in the mountainous state of Mizoram are turning into rat killers. "The situation is indeed alarming and if preventive steps are not taken immediately, the state may witness a severe disaster," said C. Rokhuma, vice chairman of newly-formed state rodent control committee. "The rats have caused extensive damage to human properties, paddy fields, pepper cultivation, besides biting people," Rokhuma told the Associated Press. The state government already has paid 90,000 rupees (\$2,100) as reward to rat catchers.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Two wounded in shelling in Lebanon

TYRE (R) — A Lebanese man and woman were wounded on Sunday in shelling from inside Israel's south Lebanon occupation zone, a security source said. Kassera Nasser, 70, and Fatima Mugashir, 30, were wounded in the village of Haddatha just north of the western sector of the 15 km deep occupation zone, the source added. In Beirut, a spokesman for the Iranian-backed Hizbollah guerrilla movement claimed responsibility for several attacks on positions of Israeli troops and their local South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia allies inside the zone.

Israeli settler killed on army firing range

TEL AVIV (AP) — The mangled body of a 16-year-old Israeli youth was found Sunday on an army firing range in the West Bank, police said. The teenager, whose name was not immediately disclosed, had apparently picked up an unexploded shell or other explosive device, police spokeswoman Linda Menutim said. The youth, who was from the nearby Jewish settlement of Maale Adumim, had been missing since Saturday morning, she said.

Arafat holds talks with Sultan Qaboos

MUSCAT (AP) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat discussed the Middle East peace process with Sultan Qaboos on Sunday, the official Oman news agency reported. It said Arafat briefed Qaboos on plans to declare a Palestinian state. Oman was Arafat's third stop in the Gulf after Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Iran executes killer of former official

TEHRAN (R) — Iran has executed a man who took part in killing a former prison chief and revolutionary prosecutor, the official news agency IRNA reported on Sunday. It quoted the Tehran revolutionary court as saying Ali Asghar Ghazvanejad-Jelodar, convicted for his part in the assassination of Assadollah Lajevardi last August, was executed on Sunday in the Evin prison in northern Tehran. There were no details on how the sentence was carried out. The man, a member of the Iraq-based armed opposition group Mujahideen Khalq Organisation, was charged with fighting the country's religious system and spreading corruption on earth.

'Egyptian party members arrested'

CAIRO (R) — Egyptian authorities have arrested three members of the opposition Tagammu party and charged them with threatening national security by calling for defiance of a proposed labour law, a rights group said on Sunday. The Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) said Mohammad Hassan Ouf, Yehia Fekry Amin and Wael Mohammad Tawfik were arrested on Friday after the party held a seminar on a draft labour law designed to unify legislation between the private and public sectors. It said the three were blindfolded throughout a two-hour interrogation. State prosecutors accused them of harming national interests by advising public sector employees to oppose the law, which has not yet been passed by parliament. Bail was set at 500 pounds (\$146.60) each, EOHR said. The proposed labour law bans the right to strike, gives employers greater powers to dismiss employees, and reduces workers' vacation time and maternal leave for working mothers, other rights groups say.

'Syria asks to open drug factory in Iraq'

BAGHDAD (R) — Syria has asked to set up a drug plant in Iraq under Iraqi supervision, an Iraqi newspaper said on Sunday. "The health ministry... is studying a Syrian demand to establish a medicine factory in Iraq," the weekly Al Musawir Al Arabi said. The paper said the plant would belong to the private sector and would aim to supplement the public sector. It said the request came from the Syrian Al Razzi laboratories for drug industries.

Iraq says U.S., U.K. blocking pilgrims

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq's foreign ministry on Sunday accused the United States and Britain of deliberately blocking a U.N. accord aimed at financing Iraqis on the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. "The American and British representatives on the U.N. Sanctions Committee were opposed to Iraq spending its own money... to allow its citizens to undertake the pilgrimage," a ministry statement said. Sanctions Committee Chairman Arnold Peter van Walsum on Friday said Iraq was still refusing a U.N.-proposed compromise to allow 22,000 Iraqi pilgrims to carry out the pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia, known as the Hajj.

U.S. envoy draws protests in Lebanon

KARAK (AFP) — The U.S. ambassador David Satterfield was caught up in a hostile demonstration in the eastern Bekaa Valley on Sunday, and his convoy was forced to drive over an Israeli flag, security services here said.

Satterfield's bodyguards were obliged to cock their weapons to clear a way through a crowd of about 200 supporters of the Shiite Muslim Hizbollah movement and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party — which calls for Lebanon to be part of a Greater Syria — in this village just north of the town of Zahle.

The demonstrators, marking the 21st anniversary of the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, shouted slogans attacking U.S. support of Israel, and spread an Israeli flag on the road in the path of the ambassador's convoy. After the cars had driven over it, the protesters trampled it.

Satterfield drove on to the Christian village of Qaa, north of the town of Baalbek, to present diplomas to information technology students.

Local officials in Qaa, including member of parliament Marwan Fares, issued a statement describing the ambassador's visit as "basely exploiting the end of a computing course" when his country's activities in the region "only serve the interests of the Zionist enemy."

"The American ambassador uses the cover of humanitarian activities, although his country is supplying Israel with bombs, rockets and fighter planes that kill our children in southern Lebanon and in Baalbek, and destroy the infrastructure built under the guidance of [Lebanese] President Emile Lahoud and [Syrian] President Hafez Al Assad," the statement said.

Saudi Arabia welcomes Muslims for annual pilgrimage

MECCA (AFP) — Saudi Arabia is welcoming the largest gathering of Muslims in the world as the faithful fly in from around the world to perform the annual Hajj pilgrimage later this month.

Although the attendance from Asian countries is expected to be greatly reduced following their economic crises, about two million people from inside and outside the kingdom are estimated to be on their way or already here.

The Saudi authorities have spent months preparing for the pilgrimage and devising new methods of control-

ling the massive crowds. Safety measures are in place to try and avoid the stampedes and fires of previous years.

According to passport services director general Assad Ben Abdul Karim Al Freih, almost half a million pilgrims had already arrived this weekend in the western Holy City of Mecca to perform the Hajj, a journey every Muslim must undertake at least once if they have the means.

They will wear unsewn white cloth, symbolising their equality before God, throughout the pilgrimage that culminates on Mount Arafat.

The airport at the Red Sea port of Jeddah has boosted flights to 560 a day. State-owned Saudi Arabian Airlines has said it plans to fly in about 600,000 pilgrims to this and other airports.

About 474,000 pilgrims will come from Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and the Americas, while 123,000 will be flown from within the kingdom, the state-owned airline's chief, Khaled Ben Abdullah Ben Bakr, said.

Saudi Arabia decides on how many pilgrims will come from each country, by applying a quota system — 1,000

pilgrims for every million people in the population.

But the number of Asian pilgrims will plummet this year, in the case of Indonesia from 200,000 to 71,000, as harsh economic uncertainties begin to bite and travel costs escalate.

Pilgrims from within the kingdom will also be reduced as a new government decree comes into force, banning citizens from making the pilgrimage more than once every five years.

Authorities are also stepping up the pilgrimage's organisation in a bid to avoid the tragedies of the past.